THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER

Based on the characters of EDGAR P. JACOBS

THE SARCOPHAGI OF THE SIXTH CONTINENT

Yves Sente — Part 2 — André Juillard

9th CINEBOOK
The 9th Art Publisher

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PART 2

BATTLE OF THE SPIRITS

Script: Yves Sente **Drawing: André Juillard**

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The authors wish to thank Mrs Jacqueline Moens de Fernig, Miss Marie-Laure Rippel, Mr Daniel Van Kerckhove, Grégoire Costa, Etienne Costa, Daniel Ceppi, Nicolas Vadot and Patrick Jusseaume for their invaluable help in the search for documentation.

SUMMARY OF PART 1

Early 1958. To the future pleasure of millions of visitors, Brussels is preparing to receive delegations from the most prestigious countries in the world. They are coming to present their cultures, their most advanced scientific discoveries and their most audacious social projects—as part of a sumptuous Universal Exposition.

It's this international event that a third-world terrorist movement—led by a mysterious Indian emperor risen from the dead after 2,000 years—has chosen as the theatre for his first actions aimed at destabilising Western countries.

Professor Philip Mortimer has been chosen by his nation to head the "British Industry" pavilion, within which Great Britain is proud to present its scientific knowledge and technological accomplishments.

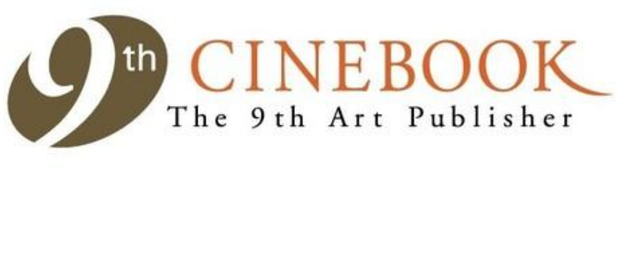
Throughout the entire Exposition, the pavilion will be linked to the Halley scientific base in Antarctica. That way, visitors to the British pavilion in Brussels can discover in real time the heartbeat of the sixth continent.

What Mortimer doesn't know is that, from their secret base in Gondwana, neighbour to Halley, the terrorists are going to use the Halley-Brussels radio wave link established by the British to invade and attempt to destroy the Universal Exposition, using a deadly new type of weapon.

Mortimer is also unaware that the Machiavellian Indian emperor poised to destroy the Brussels Exposition is none other than Ashoka. Ashoka the sorcerer, whom a handful of Indian fanatics believe to be immortal, and who had accused a teenaged Philip Mortimer of killing his daughter many years ago. Ashoka the Eternal, who had sworn to him that he would one day take revenge on him…

As the tragic events that perturb the preparations for the Universal Exposition threaten to rekindle the Cold War, Blake, Mortimer and their old friend Nasir head to Antarctica to try to derail the terrifying machination…

Original title: Les sarcophages du 6ème continent tome 2
Original edition: © Editions Blake & Mortimer / Studio Jacobs (Dargaud – Lombard S.A.) 2004
by André Juillard & Yves Sente - www.dargaud.com - All rights reserved
English translation: © 2011 Cinebook Ltd
Translator: Jerome Saincantin
Lettering and text layout: Imadjinn
Printed in Spain by Just Colour Graphic
This edition first published in Great Britain in 2011 by
Cinebook Ltd - 56 Beech Avenue - Canterbury, Kent - CT4 7TA
www.cinebook.com
A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library
ISBN 978-1-84918-077-1



AFTER A LONG BUT UNEVENTFUL FLIGHT, THE SABENA'S DC6 HAS DROPPED OFF CAPTAIN BLAKE, PROFESSOR MORTIMER AND THEIR OLD COMPANION NASIR ON THE TARMAC AT CAPE TOWN AIRPORT.

WASTING NO TIME, THEY HAIL A TAXI AND ASK THE DRIVER TO GET TO THE HARBOUR AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE...

... AND TO DROP THEM OFF AT THE PORT AUTHORITY BUILDING.

A FEW MINUTES LATER, THE THREE MEN ARE SEEN BY A PORT OFFICIAL. THEY QUICKLY ASK WHERE THE SHIP IS MOORED THAT IS TO TRANSPORT PROFESSOR LABROUSSE AND HIS MYSTERIOUS ICE SUBMARINE TO ANTARCTICA.

Alas, gentlemen, the Madeleine cast off over... over eight hours ago now.

Blast! Flying all this way to miss it by such a short time! How infuriating!

Isn't there another ship in harbour bound for the same destination?

Sorry, sir, but the next cargo ship to Antarctica will only call here in about 10 days.

If that is so, we will follow your kind suggestion. Don't hesitate to call us in case you hear of a new departure towards this destination. We're really very eager to get to Halley.

You can count on me, Mr Mortimer. But don't get your hopes up. Surprise departures for the South Pole are rather rare.

Well, it seems that all we can do now is be patient and start looking for a nice hotel...

I'd suggest the Alexandra's Nest. It is quite popular with European guests, I hear.

EVENING...

What would you say to a nightcap before we go get some rest, my friends?

Capital idea, old chap!

Captain! Do you see that man with the dark glasses over there, next to the man with the white hat?

He was already looking us over at the Harbour Master's. I'm certain he's still spying on us.

If they're spies, they're really not very discreet! They even seem to be coming towards us...

My dear Philip, it looks like we have visitors...

Professor Mortimer, Captain Blake, sir, allow me to introduce myself. I am Lord Archibald McAuchentoshan, and this is Captain Costa.

Lord McAuchentoshan?! The famous billionaire, protector of our planet's wildlife?...

... who's already made the front page many times for his spectacular actions!

My deeds pale in comparison to yours, gentlemen!

You're too kind. May we invite you to join us, Lord McAuchentoshan?

Please, Professor. Let's put protocol aside: Call me Sir Archibald. I'd be honoured. But I wouldn't want to impose.

Not at all! This unexpected encounter is an honour for us! And... to what do we owe the pleasure of such a visit, Sir Archibald?

It so happens that, in spite of himself, Captain Costa overheard a conversation in which you expressed your deep disappointment at not having been able to get aboard the Madeleine. Having learned of your quandary, I have come to offer a solution to your problem. Doing so for such outstanding British individuals as yourselves is, for me, both an honour and a duty.

Well... This is a happy surprise. But...

Well, then, I will brook no "buts!" Meet me tomorrow at nine at the Yacht Club, and bring your luggage, gentlemen. I wish you a good evening!

WITHOUT ANOTHER WORD, THE STRANGE CHARACTER HEADS TOWARDS THE HOTEL'S EXIT, LEAVING THE THREE MEN TO THEIR SURPRISE AND THEIR QUESTIONS.

THE NEXT MORNING, A TAXI DROPS BLAKE, MORTIMER AND NASIR OFF IN FRONT OF THE YACHT CLUB'S ENTRANCE AT THE TIME GIVEN BY SIR ARCHIBALD.

What?!... I don't see any ships suitable for ocean-going here!

Indeed! Could this strange billionaire have wanted to play a trick on us? I was once given the opportunity to read an MI5 report on his eccentricities, and believe me, he...

Good day to you, gentlemen!...

If you would be so kind as to climb aboard this launch, you shall see that I do, indeed, have a craft able to brave the open ocean...

... but it's actually an aircraft!

SHORTLY AFTERWARDS, SIR ARCHIBALD'S GUESTS ARE BOARDING THE IMPRESSIVE SEAPLANE.

It's a Blohm & Voss I "borrowed" from the Germans during a commando raid in Norway, towards the end of 1943.

Flying

Welcome aboard the Flying Yacht, gentlemen! It's from in here that I survey the areas of the world where man puts nature in the gravest danger.

It's also in here that I compose the reports that will be distributed as widely as possible amongst those who govern us. Lately, I have begun looking into the alarming problem of Antarctica's shores; they are det...

Pardon me, gentlemen...

... a radio emitter or beacon?

Oh... I think that might be I... I have a small, new type of emitter.* I must have turned it on in my pocket by mistake...

There, it's off.

Good. With this problem solved, I invite you to take your seats for take-off.

We have just started the engines, and we've noted some interference on our onboard radar. Might one of you have turned on...

We shall reach the Madeleine in approximately three hours...

Its Captain has been informed. He will stop his engines when we come near. We'll try to touch down close to it to allow you to get onboard.

3

*SEE PART I OF THIS STORY.

SOME THREE HOURS LATER, THE FLYING YACHT IS IN SIGHT OF THE MADELEINE.

Their radio operator just confirmed that they stopped their engines and are lowering a launch...

Fasten your seatbelts. We will take advantage of the calm seas to touch down, drop you off and take off again as quickly as possible.

Thank you again for your help, Sir Archibald!

It was a real pleasure, gentlemen. Say no more, and allow me to wish you good luck.

MADELEINE

Farewell, gentlemen. I hope we meet again soon!

My friends, I must admit I didn't expect to see you again so soon. Go get settled into your cabin. I'll wait for you in the mess, where you can explain to what I owe the pleasure of welcoming you aboard.

My dear Labrousse, you are decidedly the very embodiment of French hospitality!

AFTER WRENCHING ITSELF UP FROM THE OCEAN, SIR ARCHIBALD'S HUGE SEAPLANE MAKES A LAST FLYOVER OF THE MADELEINE TO SALUTE ITS PASSENGERS...

... BEFORE LETTING THE FREIGHTER CONTINUE ON TOWARDS THE SIXTH CONTINENT.

A FEW HOURS LATER, AFTER HAVING SETTLED INTO THEIR CABIN, BLAKE, MORTIMER AND NASIR FINISH TELLING PROFESSOR LABROUSSE ABOUT THEIR RECENT ADVENTURES AT THE SITE OF THE BRUSSELS UNIVERSAL EXPOSITION.*

... And this is how we decided to join you so as to make use of your stop in Halley. It will let us set foot on Antarctica as discreetly as possible, so we can attempt to unravel the plot that is being directed from there.

Well! This is some story! A good thing this Scottish billionaire's seaplane allowed you to catch up with us!

A little luck is always necessary in life. That being said, it's better not to push it and to save the strength we will no doubt need very soon. With your permission, gentlemen, I will try to get some rest.

A wise decision. I suggest that everyone do the same. There's a storm warning for tonight, and we will probably be seriously shaken.

JUST AS THE FAMOUS METEOROLOGIST HAS PREDICTED, THE MADELEINE SAILS INTO A VIOLENT STORM AS NIGHT FALLS OVER ITS ROUTE TOWARDS THE WHITE CONTINENT.

4

*SEE PART 1 OF THIS STORY.

BY MIDNIGHT, THE SHIP HAS TO CALL UPON ALL ITS GREAT MASS AND ALL THE POWER OF ITS ENGINES TO PLOUGH THROUGH THE UNLEASHED FURY OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC.

It feels like it's getting worse...

If we're going to be awake, we might as well get dressed and see if we can be of some help.

TEN MINUTES LATER, BLAKE AND MORTIMER HAVE MADE THEIR WAY TO THE BRIDGE. AWESTRUCK, THEY DISCOVER THE TERRIFYING SPECTACLE OF THE OCEAN'S WRATH.

GOOD LORD!

LOOMING SUDDENLY OUT OF A CURTAIN OF DENSE RAIN, A GIGANTIC MOUNTAIN OF ICE APPEARS ONLY A FEW HUNDRED YARDS AWAY FROM THE MADELEINE...

Good heavens! An iceberg! Hard to starboard!!!

DESPITE THE HELMSMAN'S QUICK REACTION, COLLISION IS INEVITABLE, AND THE MADELEINE IS VIOLENTLY SHAKEN...

... THEN, CARRIED FORWARD BY ITS MOMENTUM, IT GRAZES ITS FLANK ALONG THE ICY COLOSSUS WITH A TERRIBLE SOUND OF TORN METAL.

KRREEEEEEEE

Resume previous course! I'm slowing us down. We can't afford to be surprised by any friends this monster might have around here!

I'll go check if the cargo is fine. I'll be back as soon as possible to report on the damage to the ship, Captain.

Shouldn't we take the time to stop, Captain?

On the contrary, Professor! Stopping the engines in this kind of weather would mean putting ourselves at the mercy of a cross wave. A strong one could tip us over...

... And let's hope we don't have a hull breach below the waterline...

5

THE NEXT MORNING, THE OCEAN IS CALM ONCE AGAIN, AND THE SAILORS OF THE MADELEINE ARE ABLE TO ASSESS THE DAMAGE CAUSED ON THE PREVIOUS NIGHT BY THE GIANT ICEBERG.

Good news, Captain. The damage looks worse than it is. The hull is badly scratched, but there's only a small breach over the waterline, and we can plug it. It'll hold until the Europole base.

Very well. Report to me when you're done.

A FEW HOURS LATER...

Professor! Professor Mortimer!

Could you come to the deck?!

It's the Ravi Kuta!

This is too good to pass up! We have to try and neutralise Mr Singh and his uranium parcel before he gets to Halley.

It would be ideal, of course. But... how to do so?

I have an idea! Let's transmit an SOS to the Ravi Kuta. We can say that one of our engineers was gravely injured in the collision with the iceberg, that he needs urgent care and that the ongoing repairs to the hull are preventing us from leaving immediately. Let's imagine that the stricken man...

... is our good Nasir!...

... The laws of the sea would compel them to take him onboard until they reach Halley...

... A trip during which I can attempt to neutralise Mr Singh and recover the uranium! Let's see what the captain thinks of this...

An idea as brilliant as it is... illegal, Captain! I'm with you.

But... Isn't this plan dangerous for Mr Nasir?

It's no more than my duty demands, Professor. Besides, I'm the only one who has a chance of not standing out too much amongst all those Indian sailors—not to mention understanding their speech.

There isn't a moment to lose. We have to send our SOS now.

HAVING CHECKED THAT THERE AREN'T ANY OTHER SHIPS IN THE VICINITY, THE RADIO OPERATOR TRANSMITS HIS DISTRESS CALL AS THE MADELEINE STOPS ITS ENGINES.

They answered! They're coming!

Hurray!

Perfect! The engineering crew must have finished explaining to Nasir how to sabotage the Ravi Kuta...

... All we have to do now is slap some fake but credibly serious injuries onto him!

RAVI KUTA

6

AN HOUR LATER, BOTH SHIPS ARE FULLY STOPPED AND LYING SIDE BY SIDE.

RAVI KUTA

A LIGHT ROPE IS SHOT ONTO THE RAVI KUTA, TIED TO THE CABLE THAT WILL BE USED FOR THE TRANSFER OF THE WOUNDED.

PAN

Sorry we have to let you go on alone from here, Nasir, but we can't take the risk of having Mr Singh see us on the deck. Good luck!

Be careful. Oh! You haven't forgotten the sleeping pills?

They're in my pocket. Don't worry, my friends, I will succeed!

What's going on, Captain? Why have we stopped?

To take onboard a wounded crewman from a French ship that collided with an iceberg, Mr Singh.

I'm not convinced our emperor will be happy at this delay. What do we care about this wounded man?

On the contrary, I believe he will be satisfied that I didn't draw undue attention to us by violating the laws of the sea. We each have our mission, Mr Singh. Besides, it won't be difficult to make up the two or three hours we'll lose here.

A strange character, this Mr Singh. He's only come out of his cabin twice. Do we even know what he looks like?

How could we? He only shows himself bundled up to his eyes and wearing sunglasses, as if we were already in the icy wastes of Antarctica!

I wonder what he'll put on once we're there!

Bah. That's his problem. In the meantime, I'm going to go take care of this wounded person.

Everything's in order, Captain. Their doctor will look after our "wounded" comrade until they get to Halley station.

All that's left now is to wait for the Ravi Kuta to be out of sight and hope that Nasir will be able to slow it down so we can go around it and reach Halley before it does.

The weather might be working in our favour. There's another storm coming that should help us overtake the Indian cargo vessel before it sees us.

Apparently, the man suffered severe burns from a steam pipe that ruptured during the accident. He's been carefully bandaged, and there isn't much to do for the moment except keep an eye on his temperature.

Good. I leave him in your hands, Doctor.

TWENTY MINUTES LATER...

HAVING PATIENTLY WAITED FOR THE EVENING MEAL AND THE DOCTOR'S LAST VISIT, NASIR DECIDES THAT THE TIME HAS COME TO ACT.

HE QUICKLY PUTS TOGETHER A MAKESHIFT DUMMY, WHICH HE COVERS WITH HIS HEAD BANDAGES AND SLIPS UNDER THE COVERS.

There. If the doctor comes to have a quick look while I'm gone, this should fool him.

AS HE'S HEADING TOWARDS WHERE HE JUDGES THE ENGINE ROOM SHOULD BE, NASIR SUDDENLY HEARS VOICES...

Phew!...

FROM THE NOISE AND HEAT, THE AGENT GUESSES THAT HE IS CLOSE TO HIS GOAL.

Here we are...

AFTER MAKING SURE THAT NO ONE IS LOOKING IN HIS DIRECTION, NASIR—FOLLOWING THE ADVICE OF THE MADELEINE'S CHIEF ENGINEERS—PROCEEDS WITH SABOTAGING THE RAVI KUTA'S ENGINES...

Ah! The engines have stopped...

No one in sight. Perfect. Now I shall take care of Mr Singh. He must be in one of the nicer cabins, in officer country.

...THEN, HIS MISSION ACCOMPLISHED, LEAVES DISCREETLY...

8

Captain! I just intercepted a message from the Ravi Kuta to the Indian base at Gondwana. They just stopped their engines—and the predicted storm is already upon them.

Captain, a priority call from Halley station!

Put it on speaker!

Halley to Madeleine. Byrd here. I'm sorry to say we've just had a small earthquake here. Nothing serious, fortunately, except...

... that our unloading "dock" has collapsed. It won't be possible for a ship your size to make port here now.

No doubt, then! Mr Nasir's sabotage was a success! There isn't a moment to lose if we want to overtake them before daylight. I'm ordering the ship forward, full speed ahead.

WITHOUT EVIL INTENT, THE MADELEINE'S CAPTAIN ANSWERS A TAD TOO SPONTANEOUSLY FOR BLAKE AND MORTIMER'S TASTE.

Understood, Captain Byrd. We won't be making port, but we will still stop by to allow two of your countrymen to come ashore.

If they're willing to risk it... Fair winds, gentlemen!

THE TWO FRIENDS' WORRIES ARE JUSTIFIED, FOR THE UNINTENDED INDISCRETION OF THE MADELEINE'S CAPTAIN DOES NOT ESCAPE EMPEROR ASHOKA, DEEP INSIDE HIS SECRET BASE IN GONDWANA.

It seems I was well inspired to send the mind of our good Colonel Olrik to spy on Halley station. I know that Mortimer is one of the two passengers. I can feel it!

Just as I'm ready to bet that the second man is none other than Captain Blake!

Get back to your base, Major Varich. We will meet again later. Meanwhile, my faithful Rajak and his men are going to take over the station at Halley so they can give our two visitors the proper welcome they deserve. Ha, ha, ha!

UNAWARE OF WHAT IS HAPPENING ON THE SHORES OF ANTARCTICA, THE PASSENGERS OF THE MADELEINE CONTINUE SAILING, WONDERING IF THE STORM WILL AT LEAST LET THEM REACH THE END OF THEIR JOURNEY.

At last! After all these years of waiting, the hour of my revenge has come at last. You will pay for your sins, Philip Mortimer!

9

THREE HOURS LATER, JUST AFTER NIGHT HAS FALLEN OVER HALLEY...

... A SMALL PARTY OF ARMED MEN, LED BY RAJAK, HAS STEALTHILY APPROACHED THE BRITISH STATION.

Perfect. They're all gathered in the main building... Now's the time.

ON RAJAK'S ORDER, THE EMPEROR'S SOLDIERS RUN DOWN THE HILL TO TAKE UP POSITIONS NEAR THE STATION'S HUTS.

AFTER MAKING SURE THAT THERE IS NO ONE IN THE OTHER BUILDINGS, RAJAK GIVES THE SIGNAL TO ATTACK.

KRAAAK!

RAT TAT TAT

I say! You! I recognise you. You're Professor Anartapur's assistant! Will you tell me the meaning of this intolerable intrusion?!

You are our prisoners, Captain. Order all your men to gather in this mess hall and to give their clothes to mine.

You're completely insane! I'll remind you that Antarctica is a neutral territory, and that only scientists may come here. It is out of the quest...

If you value your men's lives, Captain, you will do what I say—and quickly!

OW!

POWERLESS, THE UNFORTUNATE BRITISH CAPTAIN IS FORCED TO ORDER HIS MEN TO OFFER THEIR ATTACKERS NO RESISTANCE.

10

MEANWHILE, ITS ENGINES STILL OUT OF ORDER, THE RAVI KUTA IS A TOY FOR THE ROUGH SEAS...

Captain! When are we finally going to restart the engines? This rolling is unbearable!...

... I'm constantly losing my balance, and...

Firstly, Mr Singh, it's a pitching movement we're being subjected to right now. Secondly, if you took off your sunglasses, you would no doubt find your balance improved. And finally, we're doing all we can to find the cause of this breakdown, and...

Captain! Captain!

We've just found the problem, Captain! A seal in a steampipe gave way, and several bolts snapped under the pressure.

This old tub is going to fall apart soon. Hurry up and get me to my destination, Captain, or I guarantee the emperor...

Get back inside your cabin and stay there, Mr Singh! Come on, lads. Let's go have a closer look!

Hmpff!

What's the initial estimate on the repair time needed?...

Two to three hours, Captain. If we find the right spare bolts...

A FEW SECONDS LATER, WITH THE PASSAGEWAY VACATED BY THE CAPTAIN AND HIS MEN, NASIR SWIFTLY COMES OUT OF THE HIDING PLACE HE'D LOCATED THE PREVIOUS NIGHT.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

Mr Singh! Your coffee!

My coffee? But I never ordered coffee! What is...

AS NASIR TAKES ADVANTAGE OF MR SINGH'S CONFUSION TO GRAB HIM...

... going...?!

... A PARTICULARLY STRONG ROLL DISLODGES A SUITCASE THAT FALLS ONTO HIS HEAD. THE SHOCK FORCES IT OPEN, AND IT DISGORGES THE DANGEROUS PACKAGE DESTINED FOR EMPEROR ASHOKA.

OW!

WITH HIS ATTACKER TEMPORARILY STUNNED, MR SINGH SEIZES HIS CHANCE AND LEAPS ONTO HIM WITH UNEXPECTED VIGOUR.

ITS CREW UNAWARE OF THE FIGHT TAKING PLACE IN ONE OF ITS CABINS, THE OLD FREIGHTER PAINFULLY STRUGGLES ON AGAINST THE FURY OF THE WAVES.

11

THE NEXT MORNING, THE MADELEINE, WHICH HAS TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF THE STORM TO OVERTAKE THE RAVI KUTA, STOPS A GOOD DISTANCE FROM HALLEY AND IS READYING A LAUNCH.

Good luck, my friends. And I'll see you very soon, I hope.

Thanks again for all your precious help.

Goodbye, Professor.

TWENTY MINUTES LATER, THE TWO FRIENDS SET FOOT ON THE SIXTH CONTINENT AT LAST.

Welcome to Halley station, gentlemen. Let me help you.

Thanks!

If you would follow us, we'll take you to Captain Byrd.

Lead the way, sir.

HAPPY TO HAVE ARRIVED AT HIS DESTINATION FINALLY, MORTIMER DOESN'T NOTICE THAT HIS COMPANION SUDDENLY SEEMS TO BECOME VERY NERVOUS.

May the heavens help them. And now, Captain, it's time we get underway. We have to warn Europole; they must stand ready to come to the help of our British friends if needed.

Please sit down, gentlemen. Captain Byrd will be here any minute.

Tell me, Philip, don't you notice something strange?

If you're referring to this rather lukewarm welcome, I must admit I'm a bit surprised myself.

That's not it. It seems that all our fellow Britons in this station are of Indian origin.

Oh?! Now that you mention it...

AS IF TO PUT HIS INTUITION TO THE TEST, THE CAPTAIN DECIDES TO APPROACH THE MAN WHO'S STAYED WITH THEM, UNDER A BANAL PRETENCE.

Tell me, young man, it must be fascinating for a scientist like you—being invited to take part in an expedition to Antarctica. What speciality did you study back in England?

You no move! You... sit!

?!

AT THAT MOMENT, THE DOOR OPENS ABRUPTLY, REVEALING THE MAN WHO WELCOMED THEM ON SHORE AND RAJAK, WHO LOCKS HIS DARK EYES ONTO MORTIMER'S WITH A NASTY EXPRESSION.

Here they are, Lord.

So it is them ...

AT THE SAME TIME, THE REST OF THE INDIAN COMMANDO COMES OUT FROM THE BUILDING'S OTHER ROOM.

UNDERSTANDING THAT THEY'RE DEALING WITH IMPOSTORS, THE TWO FRIENDS—DRIVEN BY THE SAME REFLEX—DECIDE TO USE THE SLIGHT CONFUSION OF THE MOMENT TO TRY AND ESCAPE.

PAK

Straight through, old chap!!

?

Hmmph!...

WHILE BLAKE SUCCEEDS IN LEAVING THE CABIN...

... MORTIMER IS SLIGHTLY LATE TAKING OFF, GIVING RAJAK ENOUGH TIME TO RECOVER. AND WITH AN ARTFULLY THRUST FOOT, HE TRIPS THE PROFESSOR.

AHHH!!!

STUNNED, MORTIMER IS QUICKLY SUBDUED.

Don't shoot him! The master wants him alive! Tie him up tight and watch him. You others, with me!

By Shiva! Where did that dog go?!

Bring him to me! Dead or alive!!!

It's the doghouse!

Right... No need to search in here. The dogs would have signalled his presence!

ONCE THE DOOR HAS CLOSED BEHIND THE TWO INDIAN SOLDIERS, THE CAPTAIN EMERGES FROM HIS HIDING PLACE.

Well, it seems that it's the same with animals as it is with humans: It's all in how you approach them! I'm sure you doggies won't tell me otherwise.

Let's check in here first.

WOOF! WOOF!

WOOF! WOOF!

GRRR...

ABANDONING THE DOGS, WHO SEEM TO HAVE ADOPTED HIM COMPLETELY IN EXCHANGE FOR A FEW SUGAR LUMPS, BLAKE RISKS TAKING A QUICK LOOK OUTSIDE TO GAUGE THE LEVEL OF ACTIVITY...

OH!!!

TOOOOOT!...

The Ravi Kuta!

AN HOUR LATER...

Welcome to Antarctica, Mr Singh. Emperor Ashoka is waiting for you with great impatience—you and your precious package.

Mr Singh and his uranium?! Good Lord! Nasir failed... The poor man is forced to play the role of the gravely wounded on his stretcher, and I can't do anything to help him for the moment...

I have to go and get some help at the French base, Europole.

Ideally, of course, I should go around the Soviet base. This might be neutral territory, but you never know with those characters...

Lydden Island

Europole Fr.

75°

USSR

Gondwana India

Halley UK

COATS LAND

ELL

FILCH ICE SH

Belgran Arg.

Hmmm... It will be a long trek. I think I'll have to ask you for another favour, doggies!

Off to Gondwana, gentlemen! Let's not tarry if we want to avoid the coming storm!

Gondwana! So it's inside that Indian base that the mind commanding our enemies is hiding!

TEN MINUTES AFTER THE HALF-TRACKS HAVE DEPARTED, BLAKE CAREFULLY OPENS THE DOOR OF HIS HIDING PLACE...

Everything seems quiet. Time to go for it, my good doggies... and as discreetly as possible!

The fugitive! I'll...

Forget it. He's too far already. Besides, all he'll find this way are the white desert, the storm, and death. A pity about the dogs; he's sacrificing them stupidly.

14

TWO HOURS LATER...

I hope I'm still heading in the right direction. You can't see more than 30 feet ahead in this blizzard...

WOOF!... WOOF!...

WOOF!... WOOF!...

What is it, doggies? What did you?...

OH!

Well! Without you, my doggies, I'd have gone right past the base without seeing it. And God knows what could have happened in this accursed storm!

A SHORT TIME LATER...

HALT!!!

Hands up! Drop the whip!

Blast! The Soviet base! Did I drift so far off my route?!...

What's going on, men?!

Er... I do apologise for my intrusion into your base. I got lost in the storm, and...

Oh! You?!

Major Varich!

Captain Blake! What a happy coincidence! Do you know that I've thought about you quite a lot since our last encounter in London?...*

15

*SEE THE VORONOV PLOT.

Do you know, my dear Captain Blake, that following that encounter, I was "promoted" to this hellhole? Thanks to our ambassador, who liked you so much. I must say I didn't like it so much myself...

Er... Do you wish us to arrest this man for spying, Major?...

Leave, Lieutenant! This is a personal matter that I intend to sort out my own way. Get lost!

?

UNDERSTANDING THAT VARICH IS SIMPLY GOING TO KILL HIM OUTRIGHT, BLAKE USES THE LIEUTENANT'S INTERVENTION TO GO FOR BROKE.

Yaaaah, dogs! Yaaah!

SHLACK

Fire!... Fire at will on the fugitive!!!

RAT TAT TAT

BANG

BANG

Yipe!

Damn!

Run, you morons! Bring him back dead or alive!

?!

That devil! The Snowcat! He took the Snowcat!!!

PTTEEEEEEWWWWW

TEEEEWWWWWW

DZING

DZING

What? You silly mutt, did you think I was going to leave you behind, wounded, after what you did for me?!

Hang in there! I have a feeling I'm going to have need of your nose again if I want to find Europole in this soup!

16

MEANWHILE, THE SNOW VEHICLE CARRYING PROFESSOR MORTIMER IS COMING IN SIGHT OF GONDWANA...

... WHERE IT SOON DESCENDS INTO THE FROZEN DEPTHS OF THE SIXTH CONTINENT...

... BEFORE ARRIVING AT LAST AT EMPEROR ASHOKA'S UNDERGROUND BASE.

I don't know what is to become of me, Mr Singh, but I shall not leave before I have expressed how much I despise you. Such depths of treachery... I must say I would never have expected this from you.

Appearances can often be deceiving, Professor...

Welcome to my demesne, Philip Mortimer!

Y... You?!

... I have been waiting so many years for the day we'd meet again!...

That... That's impossible! Surely you died long ago!...

Ha! Ha! Ha! Poor little Cartesian mind! You, too, back when we first met, refused to believe that I was eternal...

And yet... here I am! Time has no grasp on me. And, believe me, I've forgotten nothing of the past!...

And now, follow me! I want to show you the supremacy of my science over the bumbling ventures of Western research...

... before we settle our score.

Mr Singh, I presume? If you would follow me, we're going to take the "package" off your hands.

Gladly!

17

MESMERISED BY HIS SURROUNDINGS, PROFESSOR MORTIMER FOLLOWS EMPEROR ASHOKA WITH GROWING CURIOSITY.

Come nearer, Philip Mortimer! I have another surprise for you!

By Jove! Olrik!!!

Yes, indeed! I figured that Colonel Olrik would be the ideal subject to test the weapon that will allow me to bring justice to all oppressed people. You and your friends were able to gauge its efficiency at the Universal Exposition site in Brussels...

Obviously, its workings are too complex for you to grasp quickly. Since time is of the essence, I will try to simplify it to bring myself down to your level. In short, the devices connected to these watertight pods are able to extract all the electrical impulses that link together the neurons of the subjects held within...

The main difficulty was to reconstitute all the functions of the brain from the energy thus extracted from the subject, in order to direct them—through electrical waves—and make them act according to my will. With the help of Professor Anartapur here, I succeeded in doing so...

It's an honour, Mr Mortimer!

This is how I was able to guide the good colonel's virtual brain to Brussels and make him enter and short-circuit all the installations I chose as a test. Thanks to the little pocket emitter given to you by Mr Singh—devised in all innocence by his assistant Liver—I could even follow your every step, Philip Mortimer!

Impressive, isn't it?

Eternal or not, you are a real monster! What of your subject? How long will he be able to survive the torture you're inflicting on him?!

But you will soon be able to judge for yourself. The second sarcophagus was only waiting for another volunteer so that I could proceed with a simultaneous action test. I do hope that, once it's launched upon the airwaves, your brain will not be scrambled with the colonel's! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Let go of me! I'm not a guinea pig, you old lunatic! Let me go!!!

You had a good laugh at my expense in the past! It's my turn to laugh now! Ha! Ha! Ha!

That's a very good question! As far as we know, and provided the sessions last no more than two hours, the experiment should be harmless. If there is no loss of contact with the subject, of course... in which case his cerebral activity, its life, would never return to its body!

?

18

MEANWHILE...

VROOOOO... PRRRRRT, PTT...

Blast it! The fuel gauge is in the red!

This time, I'm really done for...

WOOF! WOOF!

Well, doggie? What is it?

WOOF! WOOF!

You smelt something? Go on!... Seek!...

Hey! Wait for me!

Europole, at last! Your ordeal is over, my good dog. You've earned a big bowl of food and some rest!...

AFTER ONE FINAL EFFORT, THE CAPTAIN REACHES THE GOAL OF HIS EXPEDITION.

Labrousse! At last!

Captain Blake?!!!

WARMED UP BY A BLANKET AND SOME STEAMING TEA, BLAKE QUICKLY EXPLAINS THE SITUATION TO HIS HOSTS.

... And that was how this brave dog saved my life for the second time, and how I managed to reach you so I could request your urgent help.

The problem is that the direct path to Halley goes through the Soviet zone. Usually, the Russians don't give us any trouble. They're mostly scientists like us. But now...

... what you just told us hints at some serious difficulties in securing safe passage.

There might be another way...

As I told you in Brussels, Captain, I came here to test a vehicle designed to move through water and ice. With it, we should be able to pass underneath the Soviet base and make a beeline for Halley without having to worry about the storm that's still raging.

Gentlemen, I don't think we have a choice. Professor Labrousse, the time has come for your machine's first field test!

In that case, come with me. We have just finished assembling the sub in the hangar next door. I will be delighted to show it to you.

19

A FEW MINUTES LATER, BLAKE, LABROUSSE AND COMMANDER DUCHASSY HAVE ENTERED THE HANGAR, IN THE MIDDLE OF WHICH RESTS THE AMAZING MACHINE DESIGNED BY THE FRENCH METEOROLOGIST.

Captain, meet the Subglacior!

Without going into too much detail, you could say that the way my Subglacior works is quite simple. Thanks to a steam-projection system that creates a bubble of very high temperature around it, my submersible can travel through the area of melted ice thus created as it moves along.

And... how many passengers can you take inside your vehicle, Professor?

The oxygen reserves are planned for a maximum of six passengers, including Lieutenant Vaillançon, our pilot. He's a submarine officer and was detailed to me for the duration of the tests.

Counting the seats we must keep free to bring back Professor Mortimer and Nasir, yours, mine and the pilot's... It leaves us one free spot.

Consider it taken, Captain. Captain Byrd is a friend, and it's out of the question that I abandon him in the hands of those terrorists. Besides, my military experience, as well as my knowledge of Halley station, could be useful to free him.

In this case, our commando is complete and ready to depart. Thank you, Commander!

AN HOUR LATER, WEAPONS AND PROVISIONS HAVE BEEN BROUGHT ABOARD THE ICE SUBMARINE, AND THE PILOT HAS STARTED THE ENGINE.

We're ready. After you, Captain!

Everyone, evacuate the hangar!

AFTER MAKING SURE THAT NO ONE IS LEFT INSIDE THE HANGAR, COMMANDER DUCHASSY FOLLOWS THE OTHERS INSIDE THE SUBGLACIOR AND CAREFULLY SECURES THE DOOR AFTER HIM.

Turbines are at maximum power, Professor. You can fire the thermal cannons when you wish.

WHILE THE SUPPORT STRUTS SLOWLY RETRACT INTO THE HULL, POWERFUL JETS OF STEAM ARE PROJECTED FROM THE BELLY OF THE SUBMERSIBLE ONTO THE ICY GROUND...

AS THE ICE BEGINS TO MELT, THE SUBGLACIOR SINKS SLOWLY...

... FINALLY TO DISAPPEAR INTO THICK CLOUDS OF VAPOUR.

PROFESSOR LABROUSSE TURNS ON THE SEARCHLIGHTS AND, FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, MANKIND DISCOVERS THE ICY BOWELS OF THE SIXTH CONTINENT.

Good! We've now reached a sufficient depth; we can take our heading and start advancing.

THE SUBMERSIBLE BEGINS A SLOW PROGRESSION THROUGH THE ANTARCTIC ICE CAP, DIGGING A LIQUID TUNNEL AHEAD OF ITSELF 150 FEET BELOW THE SURFACE.

Such energy expenditure! How long can the Subglacior function like this?

Several days, thanks to its nuclear propulsion...

That said, the pilot is constantly looking for liquid pockets—quite numerous in this area of volcanic activity. It allows the vehicle to save energy and to move faster.

Professor Labrousse! As a matter of fact, we're about to enter a large water pocket half a mile from the Soviet base... I'm switching gears.

CAREFULLY AVOIDING SOVIET BOREHOLES, THE PILOT CONCENTRATES ON HIS SUBMERSIBLE'S PROGRESS, LEAVING TO HIS PASSENGERS THE UNIQUE SPECTACLE OF AN ACTIVE VOLCANO UNDER THE ICE.

HAVING PASSED THE UNDERGROUND OF THE SOVIET BASE, THE SUBGLACIOR CONTINUES ON ITS WAY, FOLLOWING A WALL OF ICE THAT SUDDENLY OFFERS THE ASTOUNDED PASSENGERS YET ANOTHER SIGHT THAT NO OTHER MAN OF THEIR TIME HAS SEEN BEFORE.

This... This is extraordinary!...

... A petrified forest!

A fossilized tropical forest that must be tens of millions of years old, my friends! If only Professor Mortimer could see this!

... before surfacing a short distance from the station.

One thing's for sure: Your Subglacior has a bright future ahead of it, Professor!

Gentlemen, we're getting close to Halley. We're going to travel up through more than 150 feet of ice...

21

SHORTLY AFTERWARDS, THE ICY GROUND BEGINS BOILING NEAR HALLEY...

... AND THE SUBGLACIOR SURFACES.

Be careful, my friends!

Don't worry, Professor. With surprise on our side, everything should be fine.

The station looks deserted, aside from those two guards in front of the main building.

They must have gathered the station personnel there. It's easy to watch them this way. A handful of men will suffice.

Perfect. This will also make our task easier. Here's how we're going to proceed...

HAVING SILENTLY REACHED THEIR OBJECTIVE, THE THREE MEN MAKE USE OF A SNOWDRIFT ON THE SIDE OF THE BUILDING TO CLIMB ONTO THE ROOF.

BEFORE THEY'VE HAD A CHANCE TO REALISE WHAT IS HAPPENING, THE TWO INDIAN GUARDS ARE NEUTRALISED BY BLAKE AND COMMANDER DUCHASSY.

LEAVING THEIR VICTIMS UNDER VAILLANÇON'S WATCH, THE TWO MEN GO THROUGH THE VESTIBULE...

CRACK

... AND BURST INTO THE BRITISH COLONY'S MESS HALL, WHERE THE STATION'S RESIDENTS ARE TAKING THEIR DINNER UNDER THE SURVEILLANCE OF THE OTHER TWO INDIANS...

Hands up! And no stupid moves!

You, over there, drop your weapon!

ALERTED BY THE NOISE, THOUGH, A THIRD MAN APPEARS, RENDERING THE SITUATION CONSIDERABLY MORE COMPLICATED.

What is going...

SUDDENLY, A LOW RUMBLING FOLLOWED BY A VIOLENT SHAKING OF THE WHOLE BUILDING SPREADS PANIC THROUGH THE MESS HALL.

Goodness! The ridge!

22

WITH THE RUMBLINGS FADING AS QUICKLY AS THEY HAD BEGUN, CAPTAIN BYRD AND HIS MEN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEIR FORMER JAILORS' SURPRISE...

Ouch...

... TO NEUTRALISE THEM FOR GOOD.

Ow!!!

What is this "ridge"?...

The Central Indian Ridge? It's the largest underwater mountain chain in the Indian Ocean. It stretches from south of India to the shores of Antarctica. When the movements of the ocean floor make it twitch, it lets us know. And its temper tantrums are more and more frequent, lately... Which doesn't bode very well for the future!

Duchassy! What kind of miracle brought you here to save us from these bandits?!

Captain Byrd, let me introduce Captain Blake, head of the MI5. He'll be in a better position to give you a rundown on the situation.

OVER THE NEXT FEW MINUTES, BLAKE EXPLAINS TO CAPTAIN BYRD THE ESSENCE OF THE RECENT EVENTS.

Wait... If I understand you correctly, the wounded man those rascals have left us is your friend?!

Nasir?!

Nasir?! They left him here? Where is he?!

We were told he suffered from serious burns. Since he was sleeping peacefully, we chose not to wake him up.

Quick! Let's take these bandages off him; they're no longer of any use!

Mr Singh!!!

That would mean that Nasir succeeded in his mission?... So, it was he who threw himself into the lion's den by pretending to be Singh. Gentlemen, we have an ally within the enemy's stronghold. We have to go and help him against these Indian terrorists!

Give me a moment to gather a few hardy men and we'll be assaulting Gondwana, Captain!

Perfect. As for us, we're going to resume our course aboard the Subglacior and try to surface in the middle of the Indian base, to distract the enemy and make your job easier.

AND SOON...

Come on, boys! On the double! Time is of the essence!

MEANWHILE, VAILLANÇON, BLAKE AND DUCHASSY RETURN TO THE SUBGLACIOR...

... WHICH SOON SINKS INTO THE SEA OF ICE TO RESUME ITS PROGRESS.

23

IN THE MEANTIME, DEEP WITHIN THE GONDWANA BASE...

Come, Mr Singh! Take off your scarf so that I may see your face at last. Besides, it's high time for you to hand over your precious package to Professor Anartapur.

We're going to have great need of this uranium in the coming weeks...

Rest assured, Your Highness, that it was an honour for me to fulfil the mission with which you were kind enough to entrust me.

SUDDENLY, PROFESSOR MORTIMER UNDERSTANDS WHAT IT WAS THAT HAD BOTHERED HIM JUST BEFORE CLIMBING ABOARD THE HALF TRACK: THE VOICE! MR SINGH'S VOICE SOUNDED DEEPER! AND NOW HE REALISES THAT THE MAN WHO JUST SPOKE IS ALSO TALLER THAN HIS FORMER COWORKER. HIS STATURE IS THAT OF...

... NASIR!

What... What's the meaning of this?... Is this some sort of joke, Mr Singh?...

What is it, Professor?

Your Highness, see! This box is full of old nuts! There's no sign of the sealed container containing our uranium!

For a good reason, gentlemen! After I neutralised the real Mr Singh, I threw his damnable container over the Ravi Kuta's side. All I had to do after that was to put him to sleep and assume his identity so I could get to you!

You, over there, let Professor Mortimer go immediately!

For the last time before I'm forced to shoot!...

Nasir! Look out, behind you!

WHILE RAJAK SEEMS UNWILLING TO OBEY NASIR'S INJUNCTION, ASHOKA GIVES HIS MONKEYS A DISCREET SIGNAL...

Go on, faster!

GROOARR!
AHHHH!...
GROOARR!
Ashoka, you coward! Call back your monsters! CALL THEM BACK!
AT THAT MOMENT, THE ICE FLOOR BEGINS TO BOIL. EVERYONE TURNS AROUND, STUNNED, WHILE THE MONKEYS PANIC AND TEMPORARILY SEEM TO LOSE INTEREST IN THEIR PREY...
?!
FIRE! Shoot this devil's machine!
AS THE MEN POINTLESSLY EMPTY THEIR MAGAZINES INTO THE SUBGLACIOR'S POWERFULLY ARMOURED HULL, ASHOKA GIVES HIS MONKEYS AN ORDER. UNDER PROFESSOR MORTIMER'S HORRIFIED GAZE, THE ANIMALS GRAB NASIR...
NASIR! No! Let him go!
BANG BANG BANG
RAT TAT TAT TAT TAT
RATTAT TAT TAT TAT
I have to pull Nasir out of the claws of these monsters. As soon as the door opens, I'll dive towards these crates. It'll be up to you to cover me—without hurting Professor Mortimer!
We're ready, Captain. Good luck!
Blake?!... He's mine!
RAT TAT TAT TAT TAT
BANG
You'll have to get rid of me first!!!
BANG
ATTA
TA
Rraaah!!!
BANG
Arrrh!...
BANG
25

Confound it! Where did those blasted monkeys go?!

ROAAAARR!

!

AAARH!!

RAT TATTAT TAT TAT

AS BLAKE PULLS HIMSELF OUT FROM UNDER THE DYING ANIMAL, A FAMILIAR VOICE SUDDENLY RESOUNDS THROUGH THE UNDERGROUND BASE...

Surrender without resistance! In the name of the international laws that govern the territories of Antarctica, you are under arrest!!!

Byrd! At last!

STARTLED BY THE ARRIVAL OF THE BRITISH, THE INDIANS STOP SHOOTING.

Do not force us to open fire. International reinforcements are already en route!

?

THAT'S WHEN RAJAK GETS THE BEST OF MORTIMER AND KNOCKS HIM OUT WITH A POWERFUL HOOK.

OW!

Accursed Briton! I'm going to...

No!...

Stop, Rajak! His life belongs to me alone!

You, over there! Step away from Mortimer!

Hmm... I think...

... that it's time to get behind cover...

CLICK

SEEING THAT ASHOKA DOESN'T SEEM WILLING TO LET HIS FRIENDS GO, BLAKE LEAPS TOWARDS THE FIRST SARCOPHAGUS TO FIND SOME SHELTER. BUT HE IS SUDDENLY STOPPED BY AN INVISIBLE WALL...

BONK

CLONG

ALL OF A SUDDEN, THE ENTIRE BASE BEGINS SHAKING FROM ANOTHER TREMOR OF THE UNDERWATER RIDGE...

BROOOOOOOOMMM

?

KRAAK

26

AFTER THE BRIEF SEISMIC EVENT HAS CEASED, A STUNNED BLAKE DISCOVERS THAT PIECES OF ICE HAVE REMAINED SUSPENDED IN THE AIR, SOME SEVEN FEET ABOVE THE AREA SURROUNDING THE SARCOPHAGI.

?

Well, gentlemen? What's our situation, then?

We're in control of the base, except for this sort of invisible cage inside which these two—who look like the leader and his right-hand man—have taken refuge.

They're holding the professor and an Indian prisoner with them. Probably your friend Nasir. Oh, and also the man in the left pod.

Professor Labrousse, your opinion?

It looks like some sort of electro-magnetic cage. There's nothing for it but to shut off the source from which it draws its power.

There's something else, gentlemen. I have a bad feeling about this last tremor. We have to evacuate this place without delay. The underwater ridge can wake up again any second and swallow us all in a few minutes...

Understood. I'll take care of getting everyone out immediately.

SHORTLY AFTERWARDS, THE FREIGHT LIFT TAKES THE BRITISH AND THEIR PRISONERS TOWARDS THE SURFACE.

There's a problem, gentlemen! Halley cut the link with this place, but as you can see there's still power here. Moreover, a railroad and a whole system of cables were built in this tunnel... apparently leading towards the Russian base.

Curses! So it's the Soviets who are running the logistics for these terrorists!

We have no choice. If we want to save Philip and Nasir before everything comes down on us all, we have to go tell the Soviets that we've discovered their schemes and that they must cut the power if they don't want us to expose this scandal publicly. I'm far from convinced that Major Varich will be thrilled by such a request...

Ah! So you think you can outmanoeuvre me, you English swine?...

Rajak! Hurry up and reconnect the good Colonel Olrik's brain. Ashoka the Eternal isn't finished yet!

I'll go with you, Captain.

As for us, we'll watch these bandits and wait for your return. The Subglacior will be ready to evacuate everyone.

Thank you, gentlemen. And... good luck!

27

Some work!

What a pity that such energy was directed towards such bad intentions.

Byrd!... That light... is coming our way!

And that noise?! Good Lord! It's a train coming!

Isn't there a way to go faster, Lieutenant? This is taking forever!

I'm afraid this train isn't designed for high speeds, Major. But we're almost there.

?

EEEEEEEEEEEEEE

Come on, Private! Hurry up!

?

Don't move. Don't say a word, lad!...

What is that moron doing!? I'll go check. Be ready to go on, Lieutenant.

Well, Private?! You...

?!

Major Varich! What an unexpected pleasure!

BROOOOOOM

28

AHHHHH!!!

AFTER A FEW SECONDS, THE TREMORS—AS VIOLENT AS THEY ARE BRIEF—STOP.

Are you all right, Blake?!

I'm fine, thanks... However...

?

The... The major?...

He's dead. There's nothing we can do, Lieutenant.

The soldier was knocked out by a block of ice. He should be all right.

Lieutenant, you can still help us avoid a disaster.

Me? What do you mean?

QUICKLY, THE CAPTAIN PAINTS A PICTURE OF THE SITUATION FOR THE SOVIET OFFICER.

... You must believe me, Lieutenant. The best thing you can do is take us to your base and give the order to shut off the power supply to Gondwana. That way, we can avoid a major international crisis... as well as the world's condemnation of your country.

If you help us, we can also organise the evacuation of your base and of the whole area faster. That will allow us to save your men as well as ours before the big underwater eruption that is now inevitable happens.

Obviously... I see...

Don't move and drop your weapons! Is everything OK, Lieutenant?

I beg of you, Lieutenant. Listen to the voice of reason!

I... I have to think... Wait here...

MEANWHILE, BACK AT GONDWANA, MORTIMER IS COMING TO INSIDE HIS ELECTROMAGNETIC PRISON.

Ah! It looks like our dear Mortimer is awakening. Watch him closely, Rajak. I would hate it if you were forced to knock him out again—he'd miss the rest of our program.

Good grief, Ashoka! What the devil are you planning?

You cannot prevent anything, Philip Mortimer. In a moment, you will be witness to the demonstration of my immense power!

TAKING HIS GAZE OFF THE PROFESSOR, THE EMPEROR EXTENDS AN ANGRY HAND TO PUSH A COMMAND BUTTON...

... WHEN, SUDDENLY, ALL THE LIGHTS GO OFF. DEPRIVED OF POWER, THE ELECTROMAGNETIC CAGE SHUTS OFF, CAUSING THE ICE SHARDS THAT RESTED ON ITS "ROOF" TO FALL.

What?... What is?... Rhaaah! Why did the blasted Soviets cut off the power?

It looks like Captain Blake's plan worked.

Indeed. The problem is, the collapse caused by the last tremor seems to have blocked the tunnel entrance. I don't see how Blake and Byrd can get back here to help us free your friends.

In that case, my boy, there's only one thing we can do...

WITH A SMALL EMERGENCY GENERATOR PLUGGED IN, LIGHT RETURNS AROUND THE SARCOPHAGI, AND THEIR CONTROL DIALS SUDDENLY COME BACK TO LIFE.

Looks like the tides have turned, Highness... And it's not this weak little generator that will be able to save you.

Always so self-assured, Philip...

Whatever happens next, do not hope that you will escape my vengeance!

Why are you so obsessed with punishing me, Emperor Ashoka? You know I'm not responsible for the death of your daughter. I told you in Simla. I loved her more than anything... Why would I?...

Silence, dog! You're lying! You're lying!

What... Settle down... I assure you...

You two! Silence him! Kill! Kill him!

Well done, Professor! Excellent shooting for a beginner! As for you with the fancy mask: Hands up! Slowly!

You too, the man in black! Drop your weapon...

BROOO

... step away from Professor Morti...

ROAAAR... ARG!

AOAARRG!

BANG, BANG! RAT! TAT TAT

BROOOM

DROOOOOOOM

Mortimer! Nasir! Come under the freight lift!

Ouch!

How dare you defy me, Mother Earth?! I am Ashoka the Eternal! No one has the right to oppose me! No one!

KRAAAAAAK

BUT NATURE REMAINS DEAF TO ASHOKA'S WORDS. AND, AS THE GROUND COLLAPSES UNDER HIS FEET, THE EMPEROR VANISHES INTO THE ICY DEPTHS.

KKKRAAAAAKK

AT LAST, AFTER SEVERAL TERRIFYING MINUTES, THE EARTHQUAKE STOPS.

Nasir! Are you hurt? Your leg?...

Broken, I'm afraid. But the pain is bearable as long as I don't move.

Ahhhh...

This one wasn't so lucky, but he's still alive. Help me dig him out, Philip.

Ahhhh...

WORKING TOGETHER, THE TWO FRIENDS TRY IN VAIN TO FREE THE EMPEROR'S HENCHMAN.

There's nothing to be done. We'd need a crane. He's already lost a lot of blood. And besides, he looks like he can't be moved...

Professor!

Bad news, Professor. The Subglacior was rather badly shaken and several commands aren't responding anymore. I'm going to need your help to look into it.

I'll have to leave you alone with the wounded, my friend.

Go ahead, Labrousse. Time's running out...

Arrrrrh...

31

Arrrrrh...

Calm down. Try not to move.

My... My master?.. Is... Is he?...

Your master is gone. There was nothing we could do to save him.

If I could have done something, believe me, I would have. I wanted so badly to know why he held me responsible for the death of his daughter.

I... I can tell you...

You?!

You tried to save me when I wouldn't have hesitated to kill you if my master had asked me to. You're a good man, Professor, and I don't want to die knowing I'm letting you live a lie...

A lie?! What lie?

I remember you well, Professor Mortimer. I can picture you, a young man in Simla... But let me start at the... beginning...

My name is Rajak. My parents having died shortly after my birth, Emperor Ashoka—who had just been reborn in the area surrounding my village—took me in as his and his daughter's servant...

I must have been eight or nine when you came to visit your friend Sushil in our village to give him a knife. You obviously didn't know that Sushil had become my master's closest disciple. I went everywhere with the emperor...

I was at his side while he observed you heading back to Simla that day...

... and again that evening, when you came back at Sushil's invitation to listen to the emperor's speech.

I saw that the emperor had noticed the looks you and Princess Gita shared... as, indeed, had Sushil.

After you and the crowd had left, the emperor called the young woman into his house. He explained to her frankly that now that she was back from England, it was out of the question that a princess of her rank establish a personal relationship with a British citizen.

But, Father, I assure you this one is different from the others. He's more sensitive, more understanding, more...

More false than the others! Enough now! I order you to forget him!

The princess, holding back her anger, returned to her room with an expression of sadness I'd never seen on her face.

32

The next day, as the sun was high in the sky, I was sitting in the shadow of a cart near my master's door. He was napping. I saw the princess come out of her room.

Good morning, Princess. I'd like to talk to you about this book.

Later, Sushil. Later...

Irked at having been repulsed, Sushil looked away. He seemed to hesitate, then, after looking about him to make sure no one could see him, he went into the princess's room.

Curious, I stood up to try and see what he was doing. That was when he let out a short, loud cry of rage...

RAAAH!

Ah! Here you are, you? Do you know where Princess Gita is?

I... I saw her leave towards the pool.

Barely had Sushil run off after the princess when I couldn't stop myself from going to see what had sent him into such a rage.

On the princess's desk, I saw a diary open at the last filled page.

And... Did you read what had caused Sushil's anger?

Yes, Sahib. Yes, I discovered it...

AT THAT MOMENT, A NEW SEISMIC EVENT CAUSES THE GROUND UNDER RAJAK TO COLLAPSE.

Hel... Help me! I... I'm sinking!

Hold on, Rajak!

KKRRRAAK

AFTER THE TREMOR HAS PASSED, MORTIMER ATTEMPTS TO LIFT THE UNFORTUNATE RAJAK OUT OF THE HOLLOW INTO WHICH HE'S FALLEN.

Ahhhhh!... No! Stop trying, Professor! The slightest movement is causing me extreme pain.

How is it going, Philip? No damage?

I must admit I've been in cheerier situations. But I'm fine. What about you? Are the repairs progressing?!

We're getting there. Just a little more patience!

Pro... Professor!

Don't move, Rajak. You should conserve your strength until...

There's no "until", Professor. Listen to me... I don't want to die before I tell you the truth...

Very well. Continue your story. What had the princess written that was so important?

That... That she loved you, Sahib. She'd known since your only meeting. But her heart was torn because she loved her father, too, and didn't want to hurt him by disobeying...

DISCOVERING A TRUTH THAT HAD ESCAPED HIM DURING YEARS OF TERRIBLE NIGHTMARES, THE PROFESSOR IS SUDDENLY FILLED WITH A STRANGE FEELING OF RELIEF MIXED WITH ANGUISH...

Go on, Rajak... Please, go on...

As my master had only begun his nap, I allowed my curiosity free rein. After having closed the princess's diary, I, too, headed towards the natural pool in which she liked to swim.

Once at the pool, I saw you looking at the princess as she swam. Sushil was there, spying on you, hidden behind a rock. I saw him pull a blowpipe from under his tunic...

He aimed for your horse and fired one of the little darts he always carried with him to defend against the forest creatures he was loath to kill. Your mount reared and threw you off...

You'd just fallen into the water when Sushil saw the tiger eyeing you. When I saw that he wasn't doing anything to warn you, I understood that he wanted your death...

I was frozen, as much in fear of being discovered by Sushil as of the tiger. But you saved the princess. So, he quietly crept closer to you, and we heard you...

Then when?

Well... Tomorrow night. You know the small temple nestled on the cliff below the village? I'll wait for you there at midnight.

34

Sushil then slipped away discreetly, only to reappear further away with your horse.

Well, Philip! You lost your horse!...

So I ran back to the village to take my place before my master woke up and his daughter returned.

But... My daughter, you're wounded!? What happened?

Sushil answered before the princess did—no doubt to make sure she wouldn't leave out certain details. My master's reaction was predictable...

I forbid you from ever seeing that Englishman again, do you hear me?! Go back to your room and stay there until I allow you to come out!

So, this is how it is, then? Tonight, Rajak and I will go pay the Mortimers a visit, since they're having a party. And believe me: I'm going to scare those English dogs so badly that they'll send their son back to their accursed country on the first available boat!

Thus it was that on that same night, my master and I went to Simla.

Tee, hee, hee! I adore you already! Tee, hee, hee!

Before the emperor had time to intervene, you appeared on the terrace on the arm of one of your young countrywomen—who seemed quite gleeful in your company...

My master kneeled down and ordered me to hide too...

... I lo-o-o-ove all scientists! Tee, hee!...

When we arrived near your cottage, great was my master's surprise to discover that... his daughter had disobeyed him and preceded him there to observe you...

He had just witnessed how painfully his daughter was taking the sight of you on the arm of another, incredibly admiring young lady...

... They're so intelligent, so crazy, so strong, so...

As soon as you went back inside your house, the princess ran back towards the village... She was crying...

It was after seeing his daughter in tears that my master, full of wrath, burst into your living room... Which I'm sure you remember.

Yes, of course... Poor Gita... How could she have believed...?

WHILE MORTIMER DOES HIS BEST TO MASTER THE FEELINGS THAT ARE FLOODING HIS HEART, ASHOKA PAINFULLY REGAINS CONSCIOUSNESS AT THE BOTTOM OF A CREVASSE.

The next night, shortly before midnight, I saw from my usual spot the princess leaving her room to meet you at your rendezvous.

Immediately after her departure, Sushil appeared and went into the princess's room to read her latest entries...

... then ran out and headed towards the small temple. I decided to follow him, for I must admit I feared for the princess...

Sushil circled around the temple where the princess was waiting and continued towards Simla...

When he saw you coming, he hid and once more shot at your horse with his blowpipe. I saw you fall and twist your ankle...

Then Sushil ran back towards the temple.

When we arrived, the hour of the rendezvous had come and gone. The impatient princess stood up and was boldly starting towards Simla herself.

No! There has to be an explanation!... And he's going to tell me what it is!

Understanding that the princess was going to meet you, Sushil picked up a branch. He snuck up behind her and struck her a violent blow to the head.

OW!

As if suddenly realising what he'd done, Sushil collapsed by the princess's unmoving form. I didn't dare move...

By Vishnu! What have I done?... Gita, my Princess... I just wanted to stop you from... I... I love you!

Gita!... Rajak!... Where are you?!...

That was when I heard the voice of the emperor coming from upstream...

HORRIFIED, I SAW SUSHIL HURRIEDLY DRAW THE BLADE ACROSS THE PRINCESS'S THROAT. THEN, HE PUSHED HER BODY DOWN INTO THE STREAM THAT FLOWED BELOW THE CLIFF...

Sushil heard it too, and it caused his panic to swell. What was he going to tell his master?...

Gita!...

He pulled out the dagger that you'd given him...

I was biting my lips not to scream...

Good Heavens! So it was Sushil who killed Gita?! That's... That's unbelievable!...

And yet... Everything I'm telling you is the truth, Sahib. I swear to you!

I believe you, Rajak. Go on.

So, Emperor Ashoka arrived, furious. He'd woken up and had called after me in vain. His daughter wasn't in her room either. But he'd discovered her diary and read, with mounting fury, that she'd disobeyed him and arranged to meet you at the small temple...

That was when I heard Sushil lie...

I'd found out about your daughter's rendezvous with that Briton. So I followed her, to watch her... watch over her... I heard the princess berate Mortimer for... his tardiness... He took offence, and... er...

... he got angry, saying that he had no lessons to receive from an Indian girl. Before I could react, he'd pulled out his knife and stabbed your daughter. Then he threw her into the river.

I rushed at the murderer, but he took advantage of how upset I was. He managed to knock me out and ran, leaving the instrument of his crime behind. See!

I knew my master too well not to notice that, despite the pain of learning of his daughter's death, something in Sushil's story troubled him...

Leave me alone, Sushil... Go back to the village.

Before fleeing towards the village as well, I heard my master...

WHY? Why such a foul crime? How could that Englishman kill such a beautiful and pure soul?! Raaahh!... Tomorrow I will visit my justice upon him publicly!

The next day, remember, the emperor found you at the Simla train station. His intent was to make you admit to the crime publicly, then kill you.

HERE, ENGLISHMAN! You almost forgot this!

You threw my master off balance when you explained that the dagger he held belonged to Sushil. So, he decided to let you live, temporarily, and made up that suicide story so that you would go back to Great Britain tortured by guilt.

... my vengeance will strike you! But before that... I want you to suffer!

STUNNED BY EVERYTHING HE'S HEARING, MORTIMER SEEMS TO FORGET ALL ABOUT THE DANGER LURKING INSIDE THE EARTH'S BOWELS...

And your train left. Speaking to himself, my master wondered if he was right to let you live, and where the truth lay...

But you, Rajak? Didn't you say anything to him?

... DANGER THAT ISN'T LIMITED TO THE UNDERWATER RIDGE!

I did. What I knew was too heavy a burden for the child that I was. So I told my master everything...

37

That very night, the emperor summoned Sushil to the place where his daughter had perished and forced him to admit to his crime...

Mercy! Mercy, Highness! I panicked! Your daughter was under the spell of that Mortimer... I couldn't bear it... Mercy!...

It was with the same dagger that had slit the princess's throat that my master killed Sushil before throwing his body into the river too.

On the trip back, the emperor made me swear never to tell anyone what I had seen for as long as I lived...

Unbelievable... All those lies, that pride... All just for this... pitiful ending!...

It... It isn't the end of the story, Professor...

The next morning, my master and I were awakened by shouts. Some peasants from the neighbouring village had found the body of Princess Gita on the bank of the river...

She was still breathing, despite the throat injury that they had bandaged as best they could...

For several days she struggled against death. Often, she raved...

Philip! Why didn't you come? Philip! "Only irrational love is pure..." You said it yourself...

When he heard those words, the emperor made a grave decision...

Listen carefully, Rajak. What I will tell my daughter when she wakes up will, from now on, be the one and only truth. You will keep the secret for her own good... and yours.

A few days later, by the time the princess came to and was finally out of danger, her father had had time to refine the lie that would allow his daughter to free herself of your memory for good—and convince her to adhere to his political plans.

My master told her that he'd learnt you were already engaged in England and that your father had had your fiancée come especially for the party he'd given in your honour, as a surprise.

Embarrassed by your "passing fling" with an Indian, and afraid that it might become known—which could have ruined your wedding plans—you'd decided to get rid of the princess.

And... And the princess believed such a foul lie?!...

38

Why shouldn't she have believed it? Everything fit. The fact that she'd seen you with that young Englishwoman, and the fact that you hadn't come to the rendezvous. Her father's speeches and beliefs were turning out to be true, after all...

To cap his story, Ashoka added that Sushil had followed the princess to her rendezvous, intending to protect her, but that when he'd jumped to her rescue, just as you were about to throw her into the river, you'd killed him with the very dagger you'd given him...

But... This is all a pack of lies!

The emperor concluded by saying that I'd been a witness, and that your father had sent you away from India to protect you from the law—but that one day, he'd punish you for your crimes.

And... what became of the princess? Is she still alive?

I don't know, Sahib. A few months later, my master decided to take a trip with his daughter, who was slowly sinking into a worrisome silence. For the first time in my life, he didn't want me to go with him.

After six months' absence, the emperor came back to the village alone. I found him... changed. Thinner, more distant. The sorrow, probably. He told me that his daughter had decided to retire to a religious community in the south of India and that we had to respect her choice. I never saw the princess again, and from that time, her father never spoke of her.

PHYSICALLY STUNNED BY WHAT HE'S JUST HEARD, MORTIMER STARES AT THE FACE OF THE DYING RAJAK, UNABLE TO UTTER A SINGLE WORD.

Philip! That's it! We can leave now!

Did you hear that, Rajak? We'll be able to bring the Subglacior closer and get you out!

His death doesn't matter. He was a liar! Like all the others!

?

UNFORTUNATELY, THERE IS NOTHING THE PROFESSOR CAN DO TO CHANGE THE FACTS: RAJAK WILL NEVER TELL HIS STORY TO ANYONE ELSE...

Rajak? Rajak! No!...

Mmmpf!

39

I don't think Rajak was a liar, Ashoka. He was a simple man who really believed in your immortality...

No one is eternal. And since you cannot be the elderly emperor I met in my youth, then...

On that point, you are right, Philip... It's time...

... for my vengeance to take place...

... openly!

Princess?... Princess Gita?!

So... So it was you who came back to the village after that trip with your father! And during all the years that followed, Rajak believed...

You catch on quickly, Philip. It was I, indeed, whom my father asked to pursue his mission when he felt his death come near. And the strength I needed to fulfil it, I drew from the hatred I feel for you and all those of your race!

But, Gita... Everything your father told you was untrue. He lied only to dissuade you from seeing me again. Before I left India, he told me you'd committed suicide because of me. Otherwise, I'd never...

SHUT UP!

How dare you sully the memory of Emperor Ashoka? You're lying, like all Westerners!

MEANWHILE, PROFESSOR LABROUSSE HAS CREPT CLOSER TO HELP HIS FRIEND...

... BUT, UNUSED TO SUCH MANOEUVRES, THE FRENCH METEOROLOGIST DOESN'T DISPLAY SUFFICIENT STEALTH TO ACHIEVE ANY KIND OF SURPRISE...

YOU, OVER THERE! Not another step or I'll kill this traitor who sold out to the English!

NO!

Don't do this, Princess! Listen to me!

40

No! It's you who'll listen to me! I want you to call Halley station and demand that they restore power to Gondwana immediately!

UNDERSTANDING THAT THE PRINCESS IS NO LONGER ENTIRELY SANE AND THAT SHE WON'T HESITATE TO KILL NASIR, MORTIMER COMPLIES IN AN ATTEMPT TO GAIN SOME TIME.

Very well, Princess. Professor Labrousse will call them from the Subglacior. Isn't that right, Professor?

Yes... of course. I... I'll get to it.

MOMENTS LATER...

Hello? Subglacior to Halley station... Come in!

CREEOOOOWWOOEEE

Nothing... I hope that...

CROOEEECRR... Halley to Subglacior; Byrd here. I'm putting Captain Blake on.

Blake! At last!

QUICKLY, BLAKE EXPLAINS HOW HE MANAGED TO CONVINCE THE RUSSIANS TO EVACUATE THEIR BASE AND HELP THE SURROUNDING BASES TO DO THE SAME.

Most of the men and women who were in the area are already on board the ships. We're only waiting for you before casting off.

LABROUSSE, IN TURN, GIVES THE CAPTAIN A QUICK RUNDOWN OF THE EVENTS THAT OCCURRED IN GONDWANA AFTER HIS DEPARTURE.

The princess demands that you restore the power, and Professor Mortimer requests that it be done in Nasir's interest. I think he's mostly trying to gain some time.

AFTER PONDERING THE REQUEST FOR A MOMENT, BLAKE AGREES TO ACCEDE TO IT.

We can no longer extract you from the outside or delay the evacuation. I'll restore power to Gondwana, but... for the rest, you'll have to rely on your Subglacior and Mortimer. Trust in him, Professor. And... good luck!

Perfect! Lights are back on! I'm going back to Professor Mortimer. Be ready to leave.

MEANWHILE, GITA—AFTER KNOCKING OUT NASIR WITH THE POMMEL OF HER KNIFE—PULLS HIM AWAY FROM THE EMPTY SARCOPHAGUS.

Ah! Finally, the power is back!...

... which will allow me to turn the electromagnetic cage back on. As soon as your friend joins us again, I'll explain how I intend to use what little energy is left for my two sarcophagi... You will only have access to the space around this one.

WHILE GITA RETURNS TO HER CONTROL STATION, MORTIMER IS FORCED TO ACCEPT THAT AN INVISIBLE WALL IS KEEPING HIM AND LABROUSSE NEAR THE EMPTY SARCOPHAGUS...

Now, gentlemen, you will obey me. Because you have no other choice if you want to save not only your friend's life, but those of thousands of others!

I am going to launch the brain of good Colonel Olrik over the airwaves so that he destroys that cursed Universal Exposition, which is an insult to the third world. If you want to stop him, Philip, your only option is to go after him the same way!...

Which should give us a nice battle of the spirits! Ha! Ha! Ha!

What?... What do you mean?...

She wants me to get inside the second sarcophagus. She'll explain to you how to send my mind after Olrik's.

You really are as smart as you are a good liar, Philip. You understood everything!

SHORTLY AFTERWARDS, AFTER RECEIVING A SHOT OF ANAESTHETIC FROM HIS FRIEND, MORTIMER SLIPS INTO THE SARCOPHAGUS' ICE-COLD WATER.

Good. Now you can shut the inflow of water, open the air inlet and close the sarcophagus...

Be careful, Philip. As for me, I promise you I'll do my best to...

I... I know, my friend. Let's go. There... There's no time to lose.

SOON, PROFESSOR MORTIMER LOSES CONSCIOUSNESS. AND IT'S IN A SILENCE BARELY TROUBLED BY THE CREAKING OF THE ICE WALLS THAT EVERY-ONE WAITS FOR HIS BODY TO BE READY TO RELEASE ITS ENERGY.

HIS HAND SHAKING, LABROUSSE PRESSES THE START BUTTON OF THE SARCOPHAGUS ON WHICH HIS FRIEND'S LIFE NOW DEPENDS.

Good... He must be ready by now...

... I'll launch the colonel first, so as to give our good Philip proper motivation! Ha! Ha! Ha!

SUDDENLY, MORTIMER'S FACE APPEARS ON THE SCREEN OF THE COMMAND CONSOLE AND BEGINS TO SPEAK TO HIS FLABBERGASTED FRIEND IN A CALM VOICE.

Is...? Is that you, Philip? Are you really there?

It is I, my friend. It's a very strange sensation to feel oneself "exist" out of one's body... But it's not unpleasant, don't worry. Actually...

I'm sorry to interrupt, but Ashoka Gita has already sent Olrik on his way, and...

In that case, there isn't a second to lose! Activate the launch!

42

LOSING ALL NOTION OF TIME, MORTIMER ALLOWS HIMSELF TO BE CARRIED OFF AT THE SPEED OF PROPAGATING WAVES...

... UNTIL HE BEGINS TO FEEL SOMETHING LIKE A SENSATION OF SLOWING DOWN...

... AND THE SPACE AROUND HIM FILLS WITH RECOGNISABLE SHAPES.

Labrousse! This is incredible! I'm... in our pavilion in Brussels! It's as if I could travel freely by moving over the ambient waves and electricity; as if I was "physically" part of them...

Professor Labrousse! Can you hear me?

I can hear you, Philip... This is crazy! I... I think what I'm seeing on my control screen is precisely WHAT YOU ARE SEEING!

Ha! Ha! Ha! You're not dreaming, Labrousse! On this screen, you really are seeing through your friend's eyes...

... Do you think this dear Philip will succeed in stopping "my" Colonel? Ha! Ha! Ha!

Don't speak to the princess anymore, Labrousse. I think she can't detect what's going on from our sarcophagus. This might give us a chance. Here's what we're going to do...

A MINUTE LATER, MORTIMER HAS EXPLAINED HIS PLAN TO HIS FRIEND.

The pavilion's personnel seem rather agitated. Everyone is streaming towards the exit. I fear the worst!

Good Lord! Do you see what I see, Labrousse?!

My God!

43

THROUGH MORTIMER'S HORRIFIED GAZE, PROFESSOR LABROUSSE DISCOVERS THE STRING OF DISASTERS THAT OLRIK SEEMS TO BE LEAVING BEHIND HIM, AS IF THE BETTER TO CHALLENGE HIS OLD ENEMY.

There isn't a moment to lose if we want to save the Expo!

JUST AS MORTIMER REACHES THE SITE OF THE MOST RECENT CATASTROPHE CAUSED BY THE COLONEL, THE PROFESSOR'S VOICE INTERVENES SUDDENLY.

Good grief! Where can that scoundrel be hiding?!

Philip! One of the dials here is showing the uranium reserve to be nearing depletion. Hurry up, I beg you!

There!

Finally! I was starting to lose patience, Professor!...

So? Are you coming to "play" with me? Ha! Ha! Ha!

POSTES ET TELEP

Look how simple and fun it is. All you have to do is touch something, like... this telephone plug, for example, and...

... Ka-boom! Ha! Ha! Ha!

HOPING THAT HIS VIRTUAL PRESENCE WILL BE ABLE TO INTERACT PHYSICALLY WITH THAT OF HIS ENEMY, MORTIMER THROWS HIMSELF BODILY AGAINST OLRIK'S IMAGE. TO HIS GREAT RELIEF, HE DISCOVERS THAT THE IMPACT THROWS THE COLONEL AGAINST THE CONSOLE. CONTACT IS POSSIBLE!

44

Philip! I can't hear you anymore! You're creating interference!

Get rid of him, Colonel! Do you hear me?! Eliminate Mortimer and pull away from that control panel!

HAVING SUCCEEDED IN SUBDUING THE COLONEL, MORTIMER TAKES THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK TO HIM—ALL THE WHILE CONTINUING TO CAUSE INTERFERENCE THAT PREVENTS THE PRINCESS FROM HEARING THEM.

Olrik! Calm down and listen carefully! Your life depends on it as much as mine!

MORTIMER LOOSENS HIS GRIP, AND OLRIK, DISCONCERTED BY THE SINCERITY IN HIS OPPONENT'S VOICE, STOPS STRUGGLING.

You must know that Ashoka's sarcophagi will soon run out of energy as their fuel is depleted. We must return to Gondwana without the emperor knowing. Otherwise... our minds will never return to our bodies. Did you hear me? NEVER!

Maybe... What do you suggest, Professor?

Keep creating interference with me. The friend controlling my sarcophagus is about to create a diversion aimed at pulling Ashoka away from the control screen for yours. At that point, we will have a few seconds to fly to the "British Industry" pavilion, from which we can return to Gondwana.

Give me your trust, Olrik. For once in your life... Both of ours depend on it...

All right, Professor. Let's call this... a truce.

Colonel! Get away from that source of interference! Do you hear me, Colonel?

AHHHHH...

?

DOING HIS BEST TO SIMULATE A HEART ATTACK, PROFESSOR LABROUSSE MANAGES TO TAKE GITA'S ATTENTION AWAY FROM HER MONITOR.

Ahhhh... Princess!... I... Help...

By Shiva! He's not...

HER IRE RISING, PRINCESS GITA TAKES DOWN THE ELECTROMAGNETIC WALL SO AS TO REACH THE PROFESSOR.

CLICK

Stand up right this minute, Professor! I order you to stand up!

NOT WASTING A MOMENT, MORTIMER AND OLRIK THROW THEMSELVES ALONG THE WAVES, THEIR MINDS RUSHING BACK TOWARDS THE PHYSICAL BODIES THAT AWAIT THEM IN GONDWANA.

JUST THEN, MOVED BY A SUDDEN INTUITION, THE PRINCESS WHIRLS BACK TOWARDS THE MONITOR...

What!?... What are they?... The traitors!

FURIOUS, SHE DARTS TOWARDS THE COMMAND PULPIT OF OLRIK'S SARCOPHAGUS, BUT LABROUSSE THROWS HIMSELF AT HER...

Will you let go of me, you dog! Here! Take that!

Ow!

Heavens! She's going to kill him! I have to move in!

A SIGNAL SUDDENLY SOUNDS OUT, ANNOUNCING THAT THE MINDS OF MORTIMER AND OLRIK HAVE REJOINED THEIR BODIES.

EOEE

EEOOOOEEEOOOEE

?

Professor! Are you OK?

Let me unplug this sarcophagus and you can help me free Mortimer!

I only gave him a minimal dose of anaesthetic earlier. He should be able to wake up fairly quickly.

Raaah! Not enough energy left! It's impossible to exit the stand-by mode! It can't be! I was so close!...

Thanks... Quick... G... Give me your weapon, young man!

Raaah! I forbid you to...

PANICKING AT THE WAY THE SITUATION IS EVOLVING, GITA TRIES TO REACTIVATE THE ELECTROMAGNETIC CAGE. BUT, WITH ONE PRECISE SHOT, MORTIMER SHATTERS HER REMOTE CONTROLLER.

BANG

Ow!

UNEXPECTEDLY—AND WITH SURPRISING SPEED—THE PRINCESS LEAPS FORWARD, SLAMS HER ELBOW INTO LABROUSSE AS SHE GOES BY...

Ouch!

... AND DASHES TOWARDS A STILL GROGGY NASIR.

SHOOT, PROFESSOR! SHOOT!

It's over! It's all over! Give yourself up!

I'd rather die than surrender! If you value this traitor's life, Philip, then it's you who will give me your weapon!

Shoot, Professor! Can't you see she's completely lost her mind? Shoot!

Die, then, you dog, if this is what your masters want!

BANG BANG BANG

AHHHHH!

Philip... What was the point of saving me from that tiger's claws... if it was only to...

You didn't leave me any choice... I...

You see... My father didn't lie after all, Philip. It... It really was you...

... who killed me...

It's over...

KRRRAAAK

47

Let's hurry! We have to leave before the whole base collapses!

Heavens! Olrik! We can't leave him here...

CRACK

KRRRAAAK

Too late! We have to leave now, or else...

I'm afraid that... Hey, Philip! Isn't this your parka? You should grab it before you freeze to death!

KRRRRRRR

MOMENTS LATER, THE SUBGLACIOR'S TURBINES, PUSHED TO THEIR LIMITS, LET OUT TORRENTS OF STEAM, AND THE SUBMERSIBLE SINKS INTO THE BASE'S FLOOR...

DEPRIVED OF THE SUPPORT OF ITS COLLAPSING ICE FRAME, THE ENORMOUS FREIGHT LIFT BEGINS TO SWAY...

... AND LEAN DANGEROUSLY OVER THE SUBGLACIOR, ALL THE MORE RAPIDLY BECAUSE A LAVA FLOW HAS MELTED PART OF ITS FOUNDATIONS.

48

PUSHED BY THE MASS THAT SLAMS INTO IT FROM ABOVE, THE SUBGLACIOR BRUTALLY CRASHES INTO THE BEDROCK.

This is a disaster, gentlemen! We are well and truly stuck.

BUT AN EVEN MORE IMMEDIATE DANGER REVEALS ITSELF TO THE HORRIFIED PASSENGERS: THE LAVA FROM THE UNDERWATER VOLCANO, MAKING ITS WAY TOWARDS THEM.

SUDDENLY, BEFORE MORTIMER'S ASTONISHED EYES, THE MONSTROUS MAW OF A GIANT OF THE DISTANT PAST APPEARS...

Heavens! I must be going mad! Is... is that a tyrannosaurus?!

If you don't mind, gentlemen, I'd prefer to receive the benefit of your knowledge on more practical matters. The lava is getting closer fast!

THE PILOT OF THE SUBGLACIOR HAS BARELY FINISHED HIS SENTENCE WHEN A NEEDLE OF ROCK THRUSTS UP FROM THE GROUND AND RAMS THE SUBMERSIBLE.

It is a tyrannosaurus fossil, indeed. In superb condition, I must say. Don't forget, Philip, that Antarctica's underground contains the remains of tropical forests dating back to before the continents drifted apart.

This time, we're really done for!

Quickly! We must try and plug the breach!

Blasted machine! Why won't you just start?!

49

By Shiva!

L... Look! The lava! It's melting the rear of the hull.

This time, all we can do is commend our souls unto the Lord!

JUST THEN, A SERIES OF VIOLENT EXPLOSIONS TEAR APART THE GROUND OF THE WATER POCKET AND PROPEL THE SUBGLACIOR TOWARDS THE SURFACE AMID THOUSANDS OF TONS OF ROCKS AND ICE, CARRIED BY POWERFUL JETS OF LAVA.

BBRRAAAOOM

THE SUBGLACIOR IS LAUNCHED THROUGH THE AIR, LIKE A COMMON CORK LIFTED BY UNIMAGINABLE ASCENDING FORCES. SEVERAL MILES FROM THERE, ON THE DECK OF THE MADELEINE, BLAKE IS SCANNING THE HORIZON WITH BINOCULARS, HOPING TO CATCH SIGHT OF HIS FRIENDS IN THE APOCALYPTIC VISION OFFERED TO HIS EYES.

GOOD LORD!

This is Hell itself awakening!

We must keep up hope, gentlemen! As soon as the eruption has calmed down, we will begin searching. I still want to believe that our friends survived this cataclysm.

HAVING LANDED ON AN ICEBERG CUT LOOSE FROM THE ICE SHELF, THE POLAR SUBMERSIBLE IS DRIFTING THROUGH A RAGING SEA...

... WITHOUT A SIGN OF LIFE FROM ITS PASSENGERS...

50

AN HOUR LATER...

The eruption has calmed down... So has the sea. We can come out.

CRRRR

Your submersible did save our life in the end, Professor.

Temporarily, my boy. This small iceberg will melt soon in these waters warmed by the eruption. And since our craft is taking on water from all parts...

Blast it! I hurt everywhere!

Not a ship in sight. I'm afraid you may be right, Labrousse.

And of course, the Subglacior's radio is out of order...

Come on! We mustn't give in to despair. Can we make a fire, in case we must signal our presence after nightfall?

Here are some matches... and... er...

!

Heavens! I've just had an idea! Do you remember how this little thing created interference aboard Sir Archibald's seaplane?

Er... I... You...

You're the one who told me! I'm sorry, but I have a head-splitting migraine, and...

Wait!... That's Mr Singh's emitter!

Oh?...

... and... I'm afraid I may have lost my memory—parts of it, anyway... For example, believe it or not, I can't really remember the events of the last few days...

That's perfectly understandable. Your brain underwent a lot! But don't worry: This disruption is more than likely temporary. In the meantime, give me this emitter. Its range might be sufficient to reach the Madeleine, which is probably not far from here.

THE HOURS PASS SLOWLY AS THE MEN SEE THE ICE RAFT MELT INEXORABLY. LABROUSSE, VAILLANÇON AND NASIR—WHO'D HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO LISTEN TO RAJAK'S CONFESSION—HAVE HAD PLENTY OF TIME TO GIVE MORTIMER A DETAILED RECOUNTING OF THEIR RECENT DEEDS. NIGHT IS ABOUT TO FALL, WHEN SUDDENLY...

Listen!... Can't you hear something?

CLICK

51

THERE!

LESS THAN AN HOUR LATER, THE SURVIVORS FROM THE SUBGLACIOR ARE ON BOARD THE MADELEINE, WHERE BLANKETS AND HOT BEVERAGES ARE GIVEN TO THEM. AFTER THEY HAVE TOLD THE STORY OF THE LAST HOURS OF GONDWANA AND THE END OF EMPEROR ASHOKA, IT'S BLAKE'S TURN TO RELATE THE EVACUATION OF HALLEY STATION.

... We quickly joined the other refugees aboard the ship and cast off immediately to ensure the safety of the passengers. After that... We had to wait for news of you. And a cruel, long wait it was, my friends!

Captain Blake contacted me over the radio and asked if I could help with the search. I came as quickly as I could, and...

... and I imagine that this wonderful little "gift" from Mr Singh allowed you to locate us on your radar!

Exactly! The signal was weak, but sufficient to guide us. You'll have to tell me where I could obtain this type of mini-emitter.

I can give you this one. It's the least I can do!

And now, with your permission, I will go to bed. I'm spent.

I think we'll be right behind you, old chap!

Are you all right, Philip? Not too tired?

I feel better. Aside from these migraines, which are rather annoying.

I harbour some doubts about that...

Now, now, Philip! Such defeatism isn't like you!

I'm also thinking about our old enemy, whom we had to abandon in his sarcophagus. Without his help, I would probably not have escaped Princess Gita's technological trap alive. Our truce cost him his life...

He had no choice, don't forget! Besides... The colonel's always had a tough hide! Who knows? Maybe he's more immortal than Ashoka...

Everything will be all right after a good night's sleep!

52

THE NEXT MORNING, LABROUSSE, BLAKE AND MORTIMER—STILL SOMEWHAT SHAKEN BY HIS PAINFUL EXPERIENCE—HAVE GOTTEN UP EARLY TO ASK AFTER NASIR.

We gave your friend first aid. He's doing better, but it would be more prudent to bring him to the Cape Town hospital quickly for some more detailed examinations.

Sir Archibald offered to come and pick him up in the morning. You can make use of the seaplane to get home earlier.

Thanks for everything, gentlemen.

Professor! There's a Doctor Claes d'Erckenteel calling from Belgium. He's asking to speak to you and Captain Blake.

Blake, could you...

Don't worry, I'll talk to him...

Hello, Pierre? Blake here. I'm with Philip; he's still rather tired... No, no. Nothing serious.

Good. I have great news, my friends! Thanks to the success of your mission, calm has returned to the Exposition. The repair work is underway, and everything should be ready for the inauguration on April 17!...

The other great news is that Prince Albert, as honorary president of the Universal Exposition, was told of your exploits. He told his brother the King. Well, it so happens that His Majesty wishes to honour you with an award... Yes...

... The Cross of Commander of the Order of Leopold, for great services rendered to the kingdom. You are expected at the Royal Palace!... Yes! I'm impatient to see you again! See you soon, my friends!

Well, I say! My heartfelt congratulations, dear fellow!

And the very same to you, old chap!

AN HOUR LATER, THE FLYING YACHT TOUCHES DOWN CLOSE TO THE MADELEINE.

MADELEINE

You'll be able to get some well-deserved rest, Nasir!

I intend to head back home as soon as possible! I hope that you will both come to visit me someday!

As soon as possible, Nasir! With great pleasure!

Tell me, Philip, this little piece of rock you're studying...?

Oh! It's just a little souvenir from Gondwana... Probably more than 500 million years old...

53

THURSDAY, APRIL 17. IT'S 10:00 AM WHEN THE ROYAL CAVALCADE ARRIVES ON ESPLANADE AVENUE AND HEADS TOWARDS THE GREAT AUDITORIUM, WHERE THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE UNIVERSAL EXPOSITION IS TO TAKE PLACE.

THE ACADEMIC SESSION BEGINS WITH THE SPEECHES OF SEVERAL PERSONALITIES FROM BRUSSELS, THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE EXPOSITION. AFTER THESE, IT IS THE KING'S TURN TO STEP FORWARD AND GIVE HIS OWN OPENING SPEECH...

... May all those who visit the Brussels' exposition return to their countries convinced that a new humanism is rising over the old civilisations—without destroying any of the values gained by them throughout the centuries. And may they also be convinced that this humanism can only flourish in harmony...

... Technology alone cannot suffice to create a civilisation. In order to be an element of progress, it requires the simultaneous development of our moral standpoints and of our wills to join together in constructive effort. This is, ladies and gentlemen, the great idea that has inspired the Belgian people to invite the world to conciliate at this Exposition, which we are opening today. Ladies and gentlemen, it is with the grand hope of which I have just spoken...

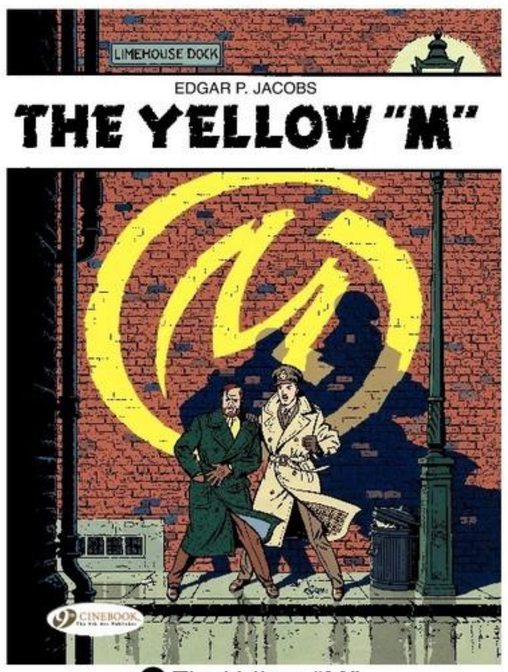
... that I declare this universal and international exhibition to be open.

THE END

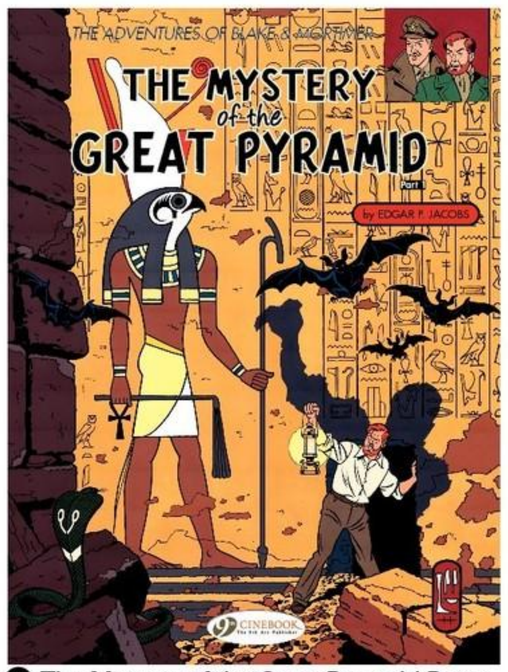
Yves Sente

André Juillard

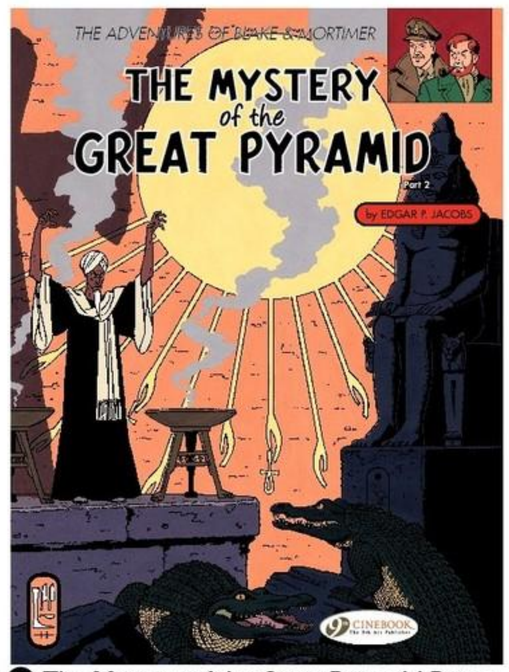
THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER



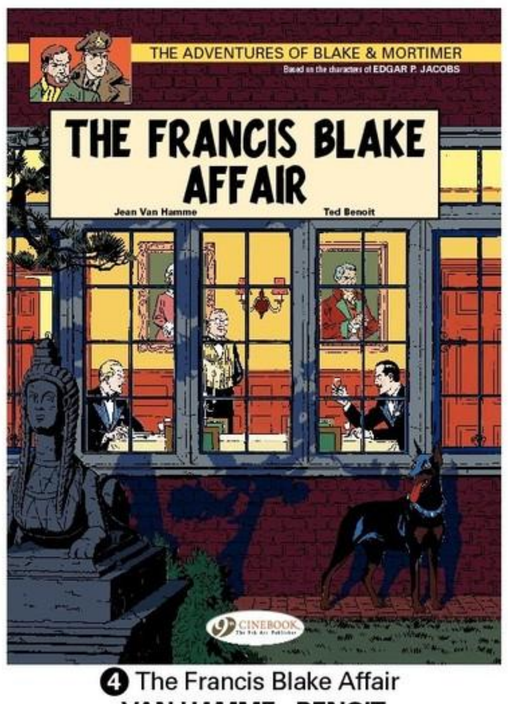
❶ The Yellow "M"
EDGAR P. JACOBS



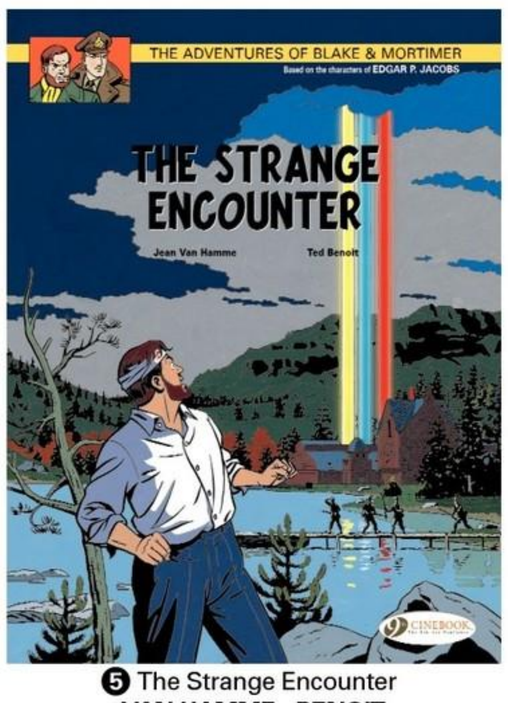
❷ The Mystery of the Great Pyramid Part 1
EDGAR P. JACOBS



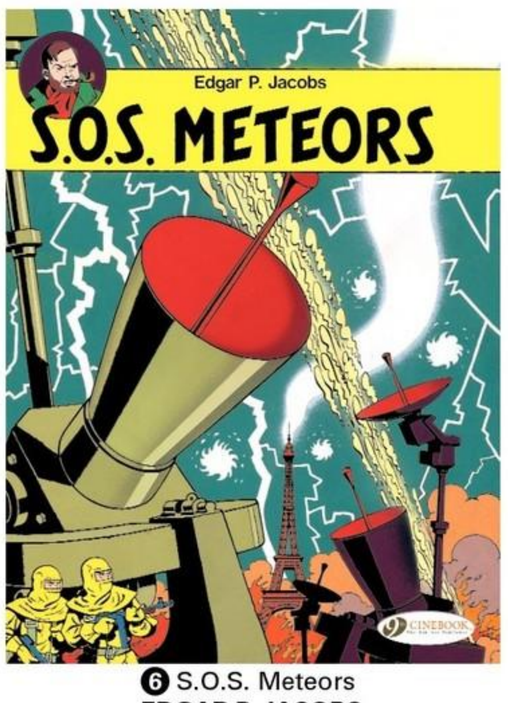
❸ The Mystery of the Great Pyramid Part 2
EDGAR P. JACOBS



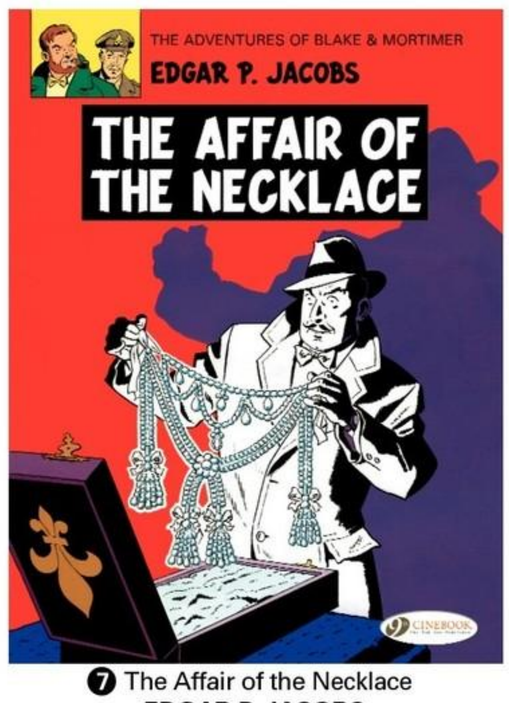
❹ The Francis Blake Affair
VAN HAMME - BENOIT



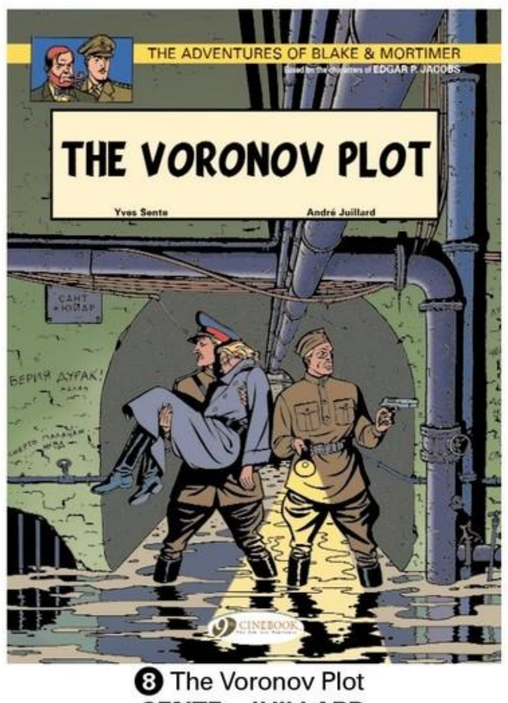
❺ The Strange Encounter
VAN HAMME - BENOIT



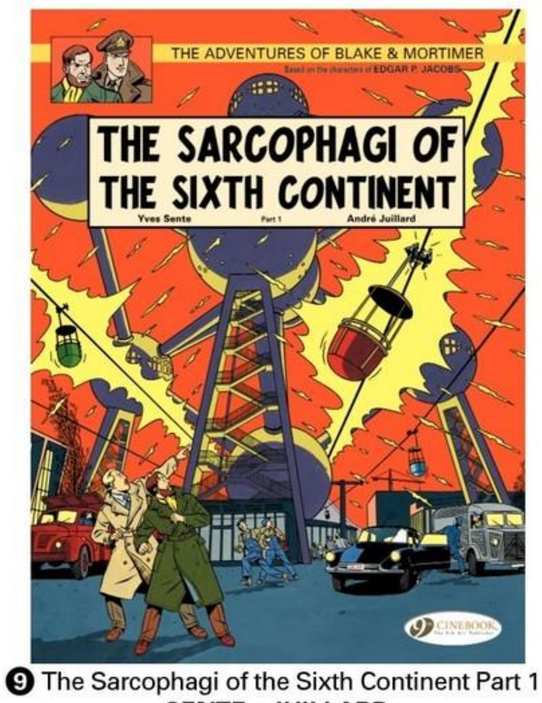
❻ S.O.S. Meteors
EDGAR P. JACOBS



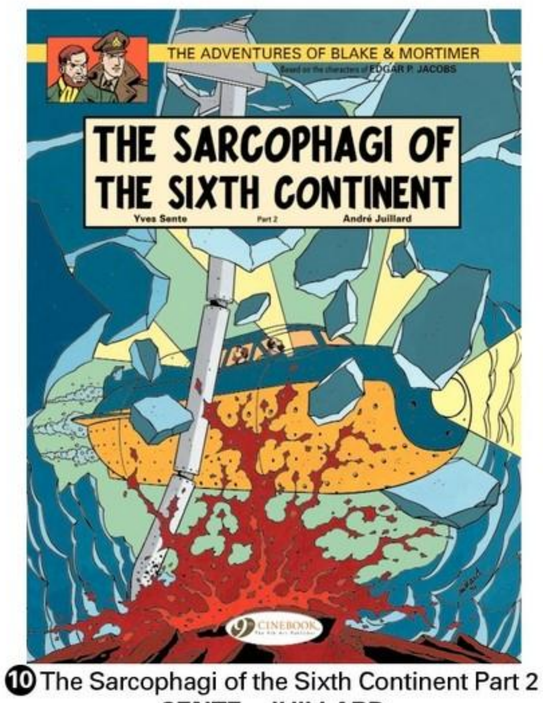
❼ The Affair of the Necklace
EDGAR P. JACOBS



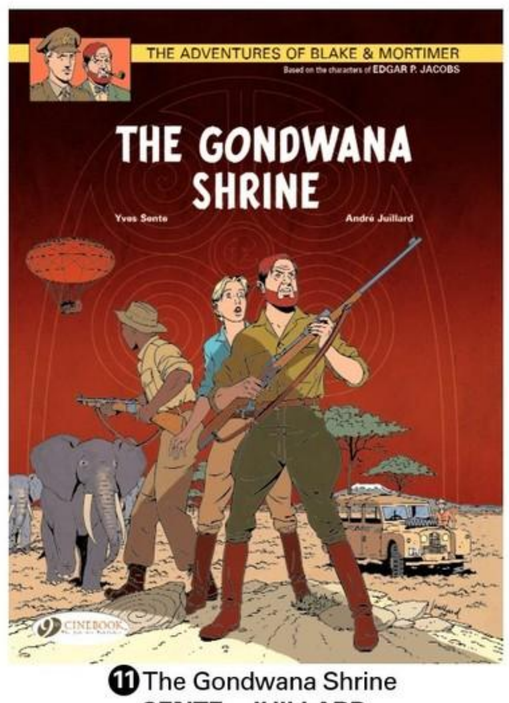
❽ The Voronov Plot
SENTE - JUILLARD



❾ The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent Part 1
SENTE - JUILLARD

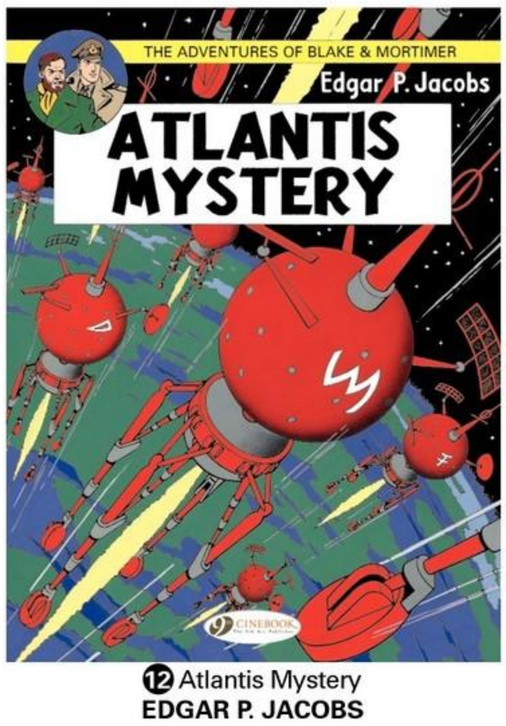


❿ The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent Part 2
SENTE - JUILLARD

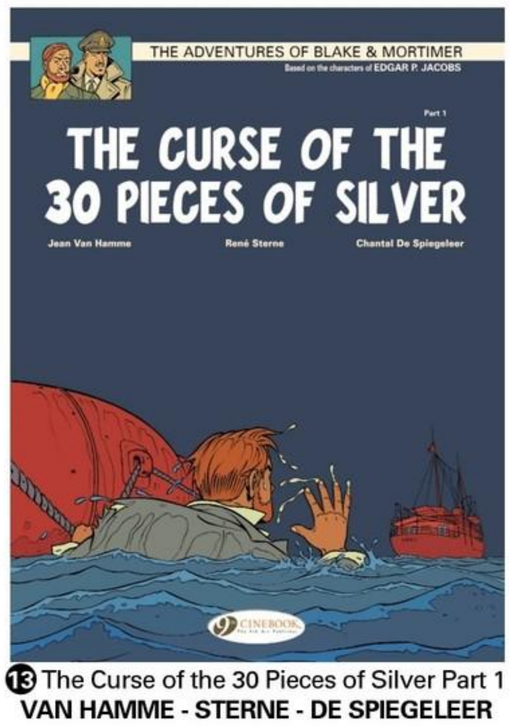


⓫ The Gondwana Shrine
SENTE - JUILLARD

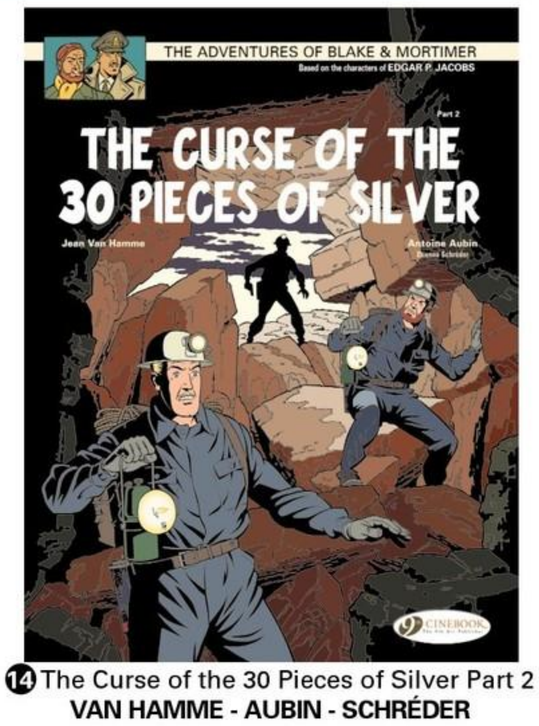
2012



⓬ Atlantis Mystery
EDGAR P. JACOBS

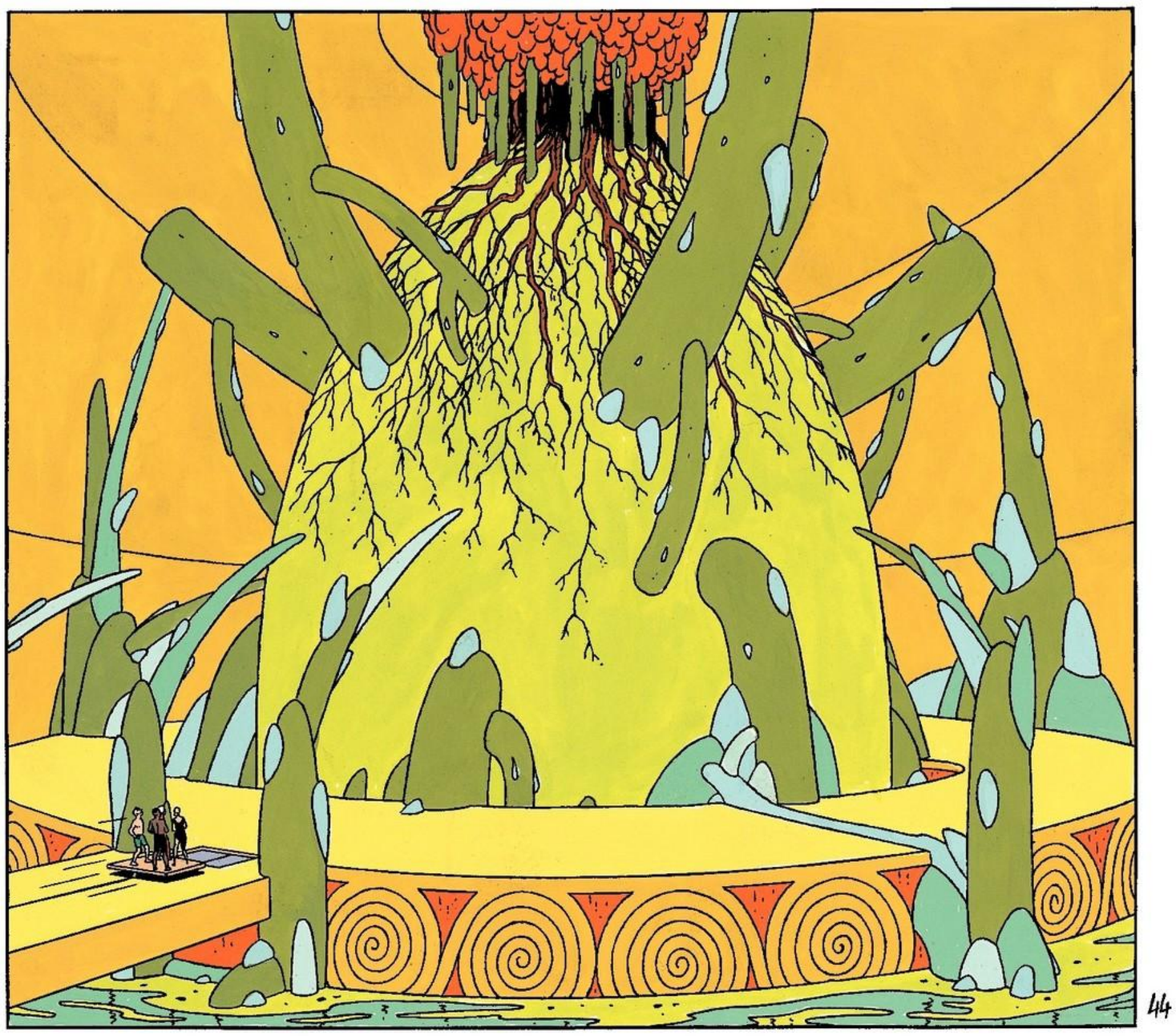


⓭ The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver Part 1
VAN HAMME - STERNE - DE SPIEGELEER

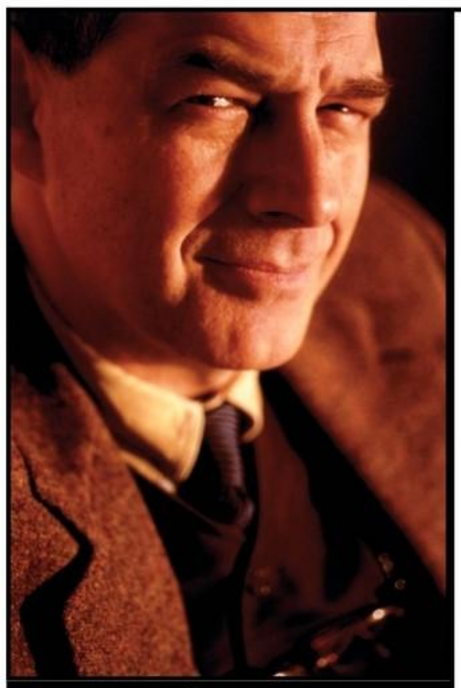


⓮ The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver Part 2
VAN HAMME - AUBIN - SCHRÉDER

THE SEARCH FOR A LONG-LOST CIVILISATION WILL TURN UP TIES WITH ANTARCTICA—IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.



© Editions Blake & Mortimer / Studio Jacobs (Dargaud-Lombard s.a.) - Sente & Juillard



ANDRÉ JUILLARD

THE GONDWANA SHRINE

SEPTEMBER 2011

TRANSLATED FOR THE FIRST TIME INTO ENGLISH

PUBLISHED BY

9th CINEBOOK
The 9th Art Publisher

YVES SENTE

THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER

Based on the characters of **EDGAR P. JACOBS**

THE GONDWANA SHRINE

Yves Sente

André Juillard

9th CINEBOOK
The 9th Art Publisher

THREE MONTHS LATER, IN LONDON.

So, Doctor, what do you think?

My dear Philip, I think the good Mrs Benson was right to insist that you come see me. Physically, I cannot see any damage...

But it seems to me that your incredible adventure in the... sarcophagus you told me about caused some serious neuronal disorders. The headaches and memory lapses you're experiencing are obviously the consequence of an uncommonly strong shock*.

You need rest. I'm afraid I must forbid you from going back to work at the CSIR for a few weeks.

I'm forbidden to work!? Heavens, Mark! What on earth shall I do with myself?

Exactly what I expected from my hyperactive old friend... Take time to enjoy yourself—as well as these tablets for your headaches. Don't you think you deserve a holiday after all the work you did for the Universal Exposition?

You know me, old chap. It's idleness that's most likely to make me ill...

Well... Why don't you take advantage of this forced rest to resume writing those memoirs of yours? You did tell me one day that you regretted never having had the time to work on them.

My memoirs?... Yes... Why not?

Exactly! Moreover, it will force you to exercise your memory before you come back to see me again. That's precisely what you need.

I'm sure you're right, Mark. As always. Thank you, my friend; I'll see you soon.

Nastasia! What happy chance brought you here, my dear?

I stopped by your house with the results of the analysis on that rock you left with me*. Mrs Benson told me you'd just left for your doctor's. And since I had some free time...

That was kind of you.

Since it's not raining for once, why don't we walk a bit?

An excellent idea. I have a lot to tell you.

*SEE: THE SARCOPHAGI OF THE SIXTH CONTINENT - PART 2.

Nastasia, I want to thank you for being so attentive to me since I came back from Antarctica...

I'm the one who should be thanking you and Captain Blake for what you did for me*. I'm delighted to be able to help you out!

As I was saying, I have some very interesting news about the geological analysis of your Antarctic sample.

I asked Driss to carry out all the tests you requested. The signs carved in the stone are definitely of human origin. Well... let's say they're the product of an intelligence...

An "intelligence?..." You pique my interest, my dear!

This rock does come from the deepest strata of the Antarctic continent. Some residue—fossilised for 350 to 500 million years—confirms that the sixth continent was once much closer to the equator.

Nothing here that is likely to confound a scientist...

Not yet, no. But, as you know, your piece of rock presents a strangely smooth surface. As if it had been polished...

Do you realise what you're telling me? An intelligence that would be over 350 million years old?! The earliest known carved or written signs only date back some 30,000 years!

I know, Professor. We had considerable difficulty accepting our own conclusions. But that's not all...

Analysis of the rock's chemical makeup showed that the grooves survived the passage of time because they are coated in gold and a sort of sheath made of... diamond.

On this enlargement, it's easier to see the grooves in the rock. Their layout cannot be the result of chance. So, we're forced to accept that they are a deliberate expression of will, perhaps artistic... therefore, of an intelligence...

Diamond-sheathed gold!? But that's... that's impossible!

Indeed, diamond isn't malleable. And yet...

All right. I'll read your notes someplace where I can give them my full attention... This is incredible! By the way... Driss did keep this research a secret?

Have no fear, Professor. We followed your instructions to the letter.

*SEE THE VORONOV PLOT.

THE GONDWANA SHRINE

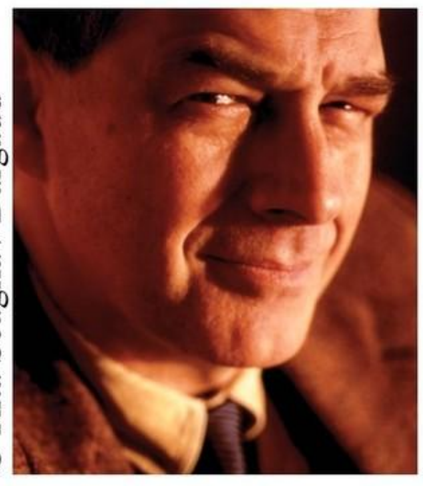
THE VORONOV PLOT

Yves Sente **André Juillard**

Based on the characters of EDGAR P. JACOBS

© Editions Blake & Mortimer / Studio Jacobs (Dargaud-Lombard s.a.) - Sente & Juillard

A Soviet rocket falls back to Earth carrying deadly bacteria. KGB Professor Voronov turns the extraterrestrial threat into a terrifying weapon that could be used to devastate the Western world—but he doesn't take into account the vigilance of Her Majesty's intelligence services. Soon, Blake and Mortimer are drawn into a lethal, shadowy war, from Moscow to London, where the stakes are no less than international peace and the real enemy may not be so obvious.



© Rita Scaglia / Dargaud

André Juillard is a celebrated artist with a career spanning more than 35 years. He has worked on famous series such as "Les Sept Vies de L'Epervier" and "Masquerouge." In 1996, he was awarded the Grand Prix at the Angoulême festival.

Yves Sente began writing scripts in 1999. He has already acquired considerable clout, being chosen as successor to **Jean Van Hamme** for the series "Thorgal" and the sequel to "XIII", and working with **Jean Van Hamme** on "Blake & Mortimer."

© E. Charneux / Dargaud

LONDON, THE EVENING OF MARCH THE 25TH

AROUND 6 PM, CAPTAIN FRANCIS BLAKE, CHIEF OF MI5—THE FAMOUS BRITISH COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE SERVICE—PRESENTS HIMSELF TO THE SECRETARY OF HIS EXTERNAL INTELLIGENCE SERVICE COLLEAGUE, COMMANDER WILLIAM STEELE OF MI6.

Good evening, Miss Pound. I'm here to meet with the Commander.

We were expecting you, Captain. Please follow me.

Thanks for coming so quickly, Francis. How are you?

Very good, William, thank you.

Thank you, Miss Pound. You may leave us now.

HA! HA! HA! Dear Miss Pound! Do you know that she's very much smitten with your charm and the fame you've acquired?

Come now, William, don't joke!

But I'm quite serious, dear fellow! The rumour mill is ablaze, and as you well know, my job is not simply to gather information but also to verify it!

Very well, I bow to your professionalism. That said, how about telling me what's behind your urgent request to see me? I must confess I'm quite curious...

All right! Let's dispense with the pleasantries. Francis, I have some serious trouble with the Soviet Union.

I'm listening, old boy.

About two months ago, my USSR station reported some very disturbing news from Baikonur, the top-secret Soviet Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. We have an agent over there, working in the hospital attached to the base. I don't need to tell you that such information is vital to the war that East and West are waging over the space race...

Besides the progress of their rocket program, our agent's penultimate report also mentioned a strange story of unknown bacteria that the Russians could have obtained from outer space...

Outer-space bacteria?! William, what are you...

KNOCK KNOCK

Come in!

Pardon me, sir, but I have a message from MOS ONE, and you asked me to use the emergency protocol if...

Yes, I know! Bring it here.

The blazes! Another one!!

Edgard Félix Pierre Jacobs (1904–1987), better known under his pen name Edgar P. Jacobs, was a comic book creator (writer and artist), born in Brussels, Belgium. It has been said of Jacobs that he didn't remember a time when he hadn't drawn.

Jacobs assisted fellow Belgian Hergé (Georges Prosper Remi) in the recasting of Hergé's *Tintin in the Congo*, *Tintin in America*, *King Ottokar's Sceptre* and *The Blue Lotus* for book publication. He also contributed directly to both the drawing and storylines for the Tintin double-albums *The Secret of the Unicorn*/*Red Rackham's Treasure* and *The Seven Crystal Balls*/*Prisoners of the Sun*.

When the comics magazine *Tintin* was launched on 26th September 1946, it included Jacobs' story *Le secret de l'Espadon* (*The Secret of the Swordfish*). This story would be the first in the Blake and Mortimer series.

The characters of Captain Francis Blake, dashing head of MI5, his friend Professor Philip Mortimer, a nuclear physicist, and their sworn enemy Colonel Olrik became legendary heroes of the 9th art in the long-running series.

After Jacobs' death in 1987, Bob de Moor completed his unfinished last story. In the mid-1990s, the series was continued by the Jacobs Studios with two teams of writers and artists: Van Hamme/Benoit and Sente/Juillard.

ORIGINAL FRENCH EDITION			CINEBOOK EDITION		
1	1950	Le Secret de l'Espadon, T1			The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 1
2	1953	Le Secret de l'Espadon, T2			The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 2
3	1953	Le Secret de l'Espadon, T3			The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 3
4	1954	Le Mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T1	2	2007	The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 1
5	1955	Le Mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T2	3	2008	The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 2
6	1956	La Marque Jaune	1	2007	The Yellow "M"
7	1957	L'Énigme de l'Atlantide	12	2012	Atlantis Mystery
8	1959	S.O.S. Météores	6	2009	S.O.S. Meteors
9	1962	Le Piège diabolique			The Time Trap
10	1967	L'Affaire du Collier	7	2010	The Affair of the Necklace
11	1971	Les trois Formules du Professeur Satō, T1			Professor Satō's Three Formulas, Part 1
12	1990	Les trois Formules du Professeur Satō, T2 (Jacobs/De Moor)			Professor Satō's Three Formulas, Part 2
13	1996	L'Affaire Francis Blake (Van Hamme/Benoit)	4	2008	The Francis Blake Affair
14	2000	La Machination Voronov (Sente/Juillard)	8	2010	The Voronov Plot
15	2001	L'Étrange Rendez-Vous (Van Hamme/Benoit)	5	2009	The Strange Encounter
16	2003	Les Sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T1 (Sente/Juillard)	9	2011	The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 1
17	2004	Les Sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T2 (Sente/Juillard)	10	2011	The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 2
18	2008	Le sanctuaire du Gondwana (Sente/Juillard)	11	2011	The Gondwana Shrine
19	2009	La malédiction des 30 deniers, T1 (Van Hamme/Sterne/De Spiegeleer)	13	2012	The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver, Part 1
20	2010	La malédiction des 30 deniers, T2 (Van Hamme/Aubin)	14	2012	The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver, Part 2

LYNX-EMPIRE